

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED MINISTRY: LIBERATING ORDINARY
FOLLOWERS OF JESUS TO PARTICIPATE
IN THE SUPERNATURAL

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ABSTRACT

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by
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United Theological Seminary, 2023

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The lack of Spirit-empowered workers for a post-Christendom mission field derives from cognitive and affective barriers to the supernatural. A process for leading followers of Jesus to reclaim the validity and availability of the supernatural through a *metanoia* of heart and mind will liberate followers of Jesus to participate in supernatural ministry. The context of this project is First United Methodist Church in Hobbs, NM. Data will be collected via questionnaires, journals, discussions, and interviews. Through a process of unlearning and learning, participants will feel more informed, confident, and liberated to participate in supernatural ministry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank God for gently drawing me to experience salvation as a young girl and filling me with the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit. With appreciation and awe, I give thanks for the invitation to partner with Jesus in the ministry of proclaiming good news to the poor, freedom for the prisoners, recovery of sight to the blind, and setting the oppressed free (Luke 4:18).

To my mentor, Dr. Michael Beck, your passion and drive to equip workers for God's mission field inspire me, and your insightful guidance has been invaluable to my work. Dr. Rosario Picardo, your support as Academic Advisor has provided steadiness during the peaks and valleys of this process. Jorge Acevedo, your dedication to the renewal of the Church offers much encouragement. To the faculty and staff of the Doctor of Ministry program, thank you for providing this valuable opportunity to rededicate myself to the work of the Church and to crystalize God's calling during this season of ministry.

I am indebted to my professional associates, Dr. Frank Billman, Dr. Peter Bellini, Dr. Eduardo Rivera, and Dr. Bobby Cabot. Your contributions to this project are greatly appreciated, and your Spirit-filled leadership within the Church is an inspiration. To President Dr. Kent Millard and Academic Dean Dr. David Watson, thank you for your commitment to bold innovation while remaining firmly rooted within our historic faith.

To my peer associate Heather Jallad, I will always treasure your heart of gold and your determination to proclaim the Gospel beyond boundaries. To cohort member Susan Arnold, your apostolic spirit and deep faith are beautiful demonstrations of God's grace. Thanks to each Fresh Expressions and Church Renewal cohort member for your rich contribution to our shared experience.

My appreciation further abounds for the leadership of Nita Kuehn and Bob Hamp, and I give thanks for faith-forming friendships with Angela Carter, Erin Owens, and Brandi Cantrell. I am also thankful to my grandmother, Ruth Hightower Norman, for her powerful legacy and witness to the work of the Spirit and to my mother, Cynthia Hightower, for modeling a strong faith in God's supernatural provision.

I would like to thank the members of First United Methodist Church who have loved and nurtured our family for the past five years. I will always treasure you. I would especially like to thank the members of FUMC who participated in my ministry project. You courageously delved into challenging content with a determination to learn and grow, and you taught me a great deal in the process. You give me hope for the future of the Church. I love and appreciate each of you. Finally, I am thankful for the spiritual friendship and support of context associate Angela Hill. Dear friend, we are just getting started.

I thank everyone who has supported this work of challenging assumptions and removing barriers. May the abundant grace of God the Father, the generous intentions of our loving Lord Jesus, and the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my husband, Nick. You are my best friend, confidante, ministry partner, and forever love. Thank you for supporting me in this endeavor. This work is also dedicated to our children, Ruth, Josiah, and Malachi. Your love and support mean the world to me. I love you.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CCR	Creating a Culture of Renewal
FUMC	First United Methodist Church
NIV	New International Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
PDAP	Palmer Drug Abuse Program
UMC	United Methodist Church

Therefore I glory in Christ Jesus in my service to God. I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me . . . by the power of signs and wonders, through the power of the Spirit of God. So from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ.

—The Apostle Paul, Romans 15:17-19

INTRODUCTION

The rich gifts of the Holy Spirit have been deposited within the Church in every age, yet many Christ-followers are hesitant to claim this spiritual inheritance. A process for equipping disciples for Spirit-empowered ministry is crucial if we are to do the “greater works” that Jesus said would be performed by those who believe in him.¹ Resistance to supernatural ministry is primarily due to cognitive and affective barriers to the work of the Spirit.² Some of these limiting beliefs have been embedded through theological beliefs, others have been absorbed through philosophical and cultural assumptions, and most have been reinforced by a reduced and redacted history of the work of the Spirit in the Church. If change is desired, the solution includes not only learning new ideas and practices but also an intentional unlearning of that which has systematically excluded the supernatural from the life of the Church. This calls for *metanoia*, a change of heart or mind.³ In this case, both are needed.

¹ John 14:12, New Revised Standard Version. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this document are from the NRSV.

² Francis MacNutt, *Healing* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1999), 31-6. MacNutt lists the following intellectual and emotional prejudices against healing ministry (these can also be applied to supernatural ministry): Negative stereotypes of “faith healers,” belief that sickness is one’s “cross to bear,” assumption that only saintly persons can work miracles, view that signs and wonders are no longer needed (cessationism), and the bias that belief in miracles reflects primitive or pre-scientific faith.

³ Adam Ellwanger, *Metanoia: Rhetoric, Authenticity, and the Transformation of the Self* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2020), 3.

Metanoia denotes “a profound transformation of the epistemic orientation of the whole person.”⁴ Behavior is rooted in belief.⁵ If we desire to change our behavior, we must first change our minds. Cognitive (intellectual) change leads to affective (emotional) change, and affective change leads to conative (behavioral) change. Therefore, a readiness to participate in supernatural ministry is nurtured by identifying and resolving inward resistance to the work of the Spirit through a process of unlearning and learning.

This Doctor of Ministry project aims to prove my hypothesis that a process for leading followers of Jesus to reclaim the validity and availability of the supernatural through a *metanoia* of heart and mind will liberate followers of Jesus to participate in Spirit-empowered ministry. This transformation occurs as limiting beliefs and assumptions are removed so that the work of the Spirit may flow freely and naturally through ordinary followers of Jesus.

Additionally, I have implemented this work to partner with, support, and strengthen the apostolic and evangelistic work of Fresh Expressions⁶ and similar

⁴ Kelly A. Myers, “‘Metanoia’ and the Transformation of Opportunity.” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 40, no 1 (2011): 10. Myers is referencing the work of Alan J. Torrance here, who is, in turn, drawing on the work of Kierkegaard.

⁵ Bob Hamp, *Think Differently, Learn Differently: Communication with Change in Mind* (Grapevine, TX: Thinking Differently Press, 2018), 53. Hamp writes, “Unless an idea deconstructs and reconstructs the pictures or images that people have inside their minds, deep and lasting change will not happen. Inside our souls, we have all built an internal representation of our external world. People live, grow, and change based on these representations, or structures, that their minds have built.”

⁶ Fresh Expressions began as a partnership between the Church of England and the Methodist Church in the UK (freshexpressions.org.uk). Fresh Expressions North America (FXNA) provides training and support for creating new faith communities in the United States and throughout North America (freshexpressions.com). Fresh Expressions United Methodist (FXUM) is a distinctly Wesleyan expression of the Fresh Expressions movement through Discipleship Ministries (umcdiscipleship.org/equipping-leaders/fresh-expressions.com). Although Fresh Expressions is recognized organizationally, it is chiefly a movement. Fresh expressions of church are created as contextually appropriate communities of faith within a diverse and changing culture for people who have no church connection.

initiatives that seek to cultivate new Christian communities. Each fresh expression of church is a missional opportunity to discover what it looks like for a particular group of people to orient their lives around Jesus Christ. The Church must regain this missional priority by cultivating new communities beyond the walls of the established Church. Given the biblical example regarding apostolic ministry, those initiating this type of outreach should intentionally seek God's supernatural power through healing, deliverance, signs, and wonders.⁷

It is my objective to provide content and training that will equip both the inherited church and fresh expressions of church for Spirit-empowered ministry. Michael Beck, United Methodist pastor and Fresh Expressions strategist, warns that most “revitalization strategies fail because they never escape the same institutional thinking that created the problems to begin with.”⁸ I would contend that this is also true regarding efforts built on an insufficient theology and theopraxy of the Spirit. Beck goes on to say, “*Individuals don't revitalize churches; Spirit-filled communities of Jesus followers do.*”⁹

I have observed, however, that the presence and work of the Holy Spirit are often assumed rather than specifically sought, explained, and demonstrated during discipleship classes, missional conversations, and ministry trainings. When efforts to cultivate new faith communities or revitalize existing ones are implemented by cutting and pasting well-meaning humanistic efforts rather than Spirit-reliant practices, these initiatives are

⁷ The Apostle Paul speaks of his work in bringing the gospel of Christ to the Gentiles as accomplished through “the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God” (Romans 15:17-20).

⁸ Michael Beck, *Deep Roots, Wild Branches: Revitalizing the Church in the Blended Ecology* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2019), 37.

⁹ Beck, *Deep Roots, Wild Branches*, 37.

unlikely to bear the fruit of God's kingdom. Due to a lack of teaching and modeling of Spirit-empowered ministry, there is a danger that disciples venturing into their mission fields are not appropriately equipped to rely on the Holy Spirit to guide, provide, and perform miracles within that context. Leaders operating out of an anemic spirituality will be unprepared to reap the fruit of salvation and transformation in their contexts. In traditional and new expressions of church alike, an intervention is needed to equip disciples to minister from God's source of power rather than from their own.

An additional consideration regarding the relationship between Spirit-empowered ministry and fresh expressions of church is that those who are awakened to the work of the Spirit may be forced to move outside their inherited forms of church. Many of our religious institutions have been built upon humanistic foundations with rationalistic biases against the work of the Spirit. These old wineskins were not designed to hold the new wine of supernatural ministry.¹⁰ In many cases, old wineskins are resistant to the Spirit being unleashed within their communities. Disciples equipped for supernatural ministry need to be prepared to leave behind both the comforts and restrictions of the inherited church to enter the harvest field through fresh expressions of ministry.

My project has been strengthened through the writing of four foundational chapters that are included in this dissertation. As is described below, this research has more fully informed and shaped my understanding of supernatural ministry as well as guided the direction of my ministry project:

¹⁰ Jesus speaks of new wineskins in Mark 2:18-22, saying, "Similarly, no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins, but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins." Although supernatural ministry predates modern church culture, it is seen as new or foreign to congregations rooted in Enlightenment assumptions and biases. Therefore, the "new" wine of the Spirit needs "fresh wineskins" of fresh expressions.

The first chapter begins by synthesizing my personal journey and the needs of my ministry setting within First United Methodist Church of Hobbs. Discerning the place of convergence between my ministry gifts and the context of my local congregation and larger denomination revealed a calling to equip followers of Jesus for Spirit-empowered ministry.

Chapter two lays a biblical foundation for supernatural ministry by delving into Jesus' words to his disciples regarding the agricultural metaphors of shepherding and harvesting. Motivations of compassion and urgency are stirred through Jesus' example and words in Matt. 9:36-7, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.'" Only two verses later, Jesus authorizes and commissions the disciples for the supernatural work of healing and deliverance. As Alan Hirsch notes, God's Spirit provides the context in which apostolic ministry, or the ministry of the "sent," takes place.¹¹ Whereas the remaining chapters focus mainly on barriers that need to be removed to engage in Spirit-empowered ministry, this chapter focuses on key motivations for carrying out the supernatural ministry of Christ.

Chapter three highlights the supernatural DNA of the Methodist movement. John Wesley and the early Methodists experienced manifestations of the Spirit and practiced ministries of healing and deliverance. Wesley stood as a unique figure of his day, shaped by Enlightenment rationalism and yet curiously open to the Spirit. It is time to reclaim the

¹¹ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 84.

spiritual roots of Methodism and restore our missional momentum. This chapter demonstrates that supernatural ministry is in alignment with the rich history and tradition of the United Methodist Church.

Chapter four outlines theological movements of the Church, including the schism of the Eastern and Western Church, developments within the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant Reformation, and the enduring consequences of cessationism. In many cases, these historical events within the Church have led to the dismissal and rejection of the work of the Spirit to the degree that disciples have abandoned the very tools and methodology modeled by Jesus. The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are weary and worn out from attempting to do harvest work without the supernatural tools provided by the Chief Harvester. By reviewing critical theological movements and identifying their impact, we may effectively unlearn the anti-supernatural theology that has been gradually substituted for the rich spiritual inheritance given by Christ to his Church.

Chapter five examines the influence of epistemology on our view of supernatural ministry. Enlightenment epistemology has played a significant role in the rejection of divine action and revelation. This perspective permeates much of our religious thought today, erecting barriers to forms of ministry that cannot be explained by the human mind or accomplished through human strength. The resistance to viewing God as our Source, first demonstrated by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, is manifested in the pervasive fear of being powerless or dependent upon any other source. Identifying our epistemological framework enables disciples to discern and uproot ingrained resistance to receiving knowledge, revelation, and power from the divine.

The sixth and final chapter presents project implementation and analysis of the seven-week study, “Spirit Empowered Ministry: A 7-Week Study on the Availability of God’s Supernatural Power.” The project revealed interest and hunger on the part of participants to know more about the Holy Spirit and supernatural ministry, as well as a willingness to be stretched and challenged. Learning about the supernatural DNA of the Methodist movement had an incredibly liberating effect on the group, with general excitement expressed that supernatural ministry is part of our story. At the conclusion of the project, group members expressed a readiness to participate in supernatural ministry. Additionally, several reported taking steps beyond their comfort zones to speak and act as empowered by the Spirit.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

I have clung to the goodness of God throughout my life, refusing to believe that pain, suffering, and oppression are part of God's plan for the world. Perhaps it is appropriate that I now contend for supernatural ministry as an expression of God's good will and intention for humanity. This belief in God's goodness, coupled with a strong sense of calling to equip laborers for the harvest, has instilled within me a commitment to equip disciples to do the works of Jesus through the power of the Spirit. I have discerned an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit within the United Methodist Church during my twenty years of ministry. However, I have also encountered uncertainty and confusion regarding supernatural realities.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify the synergy between the needs of my context and my personal ministry gifts. The convergence point has provided clarification regarding my hypothesis and solidified the focus of my ministry project. I will begin with a deeper look at the context of First United Methodist Church in Hobbs, NM, where my husband and I are appointed as co-pastors. This will be followed by my sense of calling and gleanings from my experience within the United Methodist Church.

Ministry Context

Ministry Context of FUMC Hobbs, New Mexico

Hobbs is a friendly community of over 39,000 people situated in the Southeastern corner of the state, just a stone's throw from Texas.¹ Hobbs sits at the edge of the desert with stunning xeriscape composed of agave, yucca, and cactus. A short drive outside of town reveals the graceful movement of pump jacks in the oilfield set against the splendor of Southwest sunsets. The city of Hobbs is nestled within the Permian Basin, a land rich with petroleum and natural gas.² For the past century, an estimated two million barrels have been produced in this vast region per day, yet experts believe that the remaining stores of oil are still greater than that which has been produced thus far.³ Hobbs has experienced the ebb and flow of boom and bust in the oil field since the discovery of natural gas in the region in 1927.⁴

My husband Nick and I are appointed as co-pastors of First United Methodist Church of Hobbs. FUMC reflects its surrounding community in numerous ways, from the rugged resiliency of those in the oil and gas industry to the current reality that both our community and church are experiencing a season of decline and uncertainty. This congregation, which celebrated its centennial in 2019, has apostolic potential that has yet

¹ "U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Hobbs City, New Mexico." 2020. Census Bureau QuickFacts. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/hobbscitynewmexico/PST045219>.

² Carol M. Tang. "Permian Basin." Encyclopedia Britannica. Last modified May 25, 2015. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Permian-Basin>.

³ "The History of Permian Basin Oil." Aresco. <https://www.arescotx.com/the-history-of-permian-basin-oil/>.

⁴ "Hobbs." Encyclopedia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Hobbs>.

to be fully realized. As one member said, “This church has always been something special. It has always had a lot of leaders.”⁵ Much like the rich deposits of oil beneath the soil of our beautiful, rugged terrain, our congregation possesses spiritual treasures and wealth still waiting to be tapped and spent for God’s glory.

As is the case in many congregations, however, our downtown church no longer reflects the racial and socioeconomic makeup of the surrounding community. Hobbs is 55% Hispanic, 37% White, and 6% Black.⁶ A walk through the immediate neighborhood of the church reveals a much larger gap between the racial makeup of the surrounding community and our predominantly Caucasian church membership. As one member thoughtfully said, “It’s not that there’s a sense of racism or exclusion within our congregation...though maybe there isn’t a sense of inclusion.”⁷

The most significant cultural mosaic⁸ within our community is comprised of culturally diverse mid- to low-income families who are technologically advanced, and the second highest mosaic includes largely bilingual blue-collar, middle-aged persons who are fluent in technology.⁹ Not surprisingly, our congregation’s most successful outreach on social media featured a young Hispanic family that offered a prayer in English and Spanish at a local elementary school.¹⁰ Of the twenty households that recorded prayer

⁵ Member of FUMC 1, interviewed by author, Hobbs, November 5, 2020. All interviews are confidential, with names withheld by mutual agreement.

⁶ *Church Demographics from FullInsite*, report, 20, <http://www.missioninsite.com/>.

⁷ Member of FUMC 3, interviewed by author, Hobbs, November 11, 2020.

⁸ MissionInsite refers to lifestyle types as “mosaics.”

⁹ “Mosaic USA E-Handbook,” <https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/mi-docs/Mosaic+USA+E-Handbook.pdf/>.

¹⁰ “Prayer for Jefferson Elementary by the Saldaña Family” video is available here: <https://fb.watch/2nY4ZJCzKG/>.

videos for this initiative, the Saldaña family more closely reflected the diverse mosaics described above. The Saldaña video received 72 shares, 160 likes, and 7.6K views, far above any other video we have created or shared. When we engage people in culturally relevant and meaningful ways, the community pays attention.

The entire video series had a remarkable reach, thanks to the earned trust and influence of our church members through decades of faithful living in the community. It was a unique opportunity and platform for the people of Hobbs to witness the faith of their friends and neighbors from FUMC, and it was an excellent opportunity for our members to stretch out of their comfort zone by providing a video prayer to be shared with the community. By taking our prayers to social media, we were allowed missional access to new places, not unlike the fields in which John Wesley preached. Further, by filming at “secular” public school campuses rather than from our “sacred” church building, our members demonstrated an intentionality to be present within the community as well as an intersection of the natural and supernatural.

This twenty-day prayer initiative was immediately followed by FUMC’s second annual “OnSite Prayer for Hobbs Schools,” in which members of FUMC were deployed to over twenty public school campuses throughout Hobbs as “prayer hosts.” Even during the pandemic, we had over 200 people show up to pray on a Sunday evening for our schools, with a higher percentage of community participants joining the following years. Intentional efforts such as these reflect a desire within our congregation to step out into mission.

Trajectory of Decline

Despite diligent efforts to engage our community, FUMC must contend with deeply concerning worship statistics. Our congregation experienced a decline from 231 to 152 persons in average worship attendance during a ten-year period,¹¹ a 34% decline from 2009 to 2018 (See Figure 1). While this may be partly due to challenges and conflict faced within the congregation in the past, it is also clear that this decline is part of a larger paradigm; our congregation's attendance parallels a nearly identical downward trajectory with the Clovis District and the New Mexico Conference.

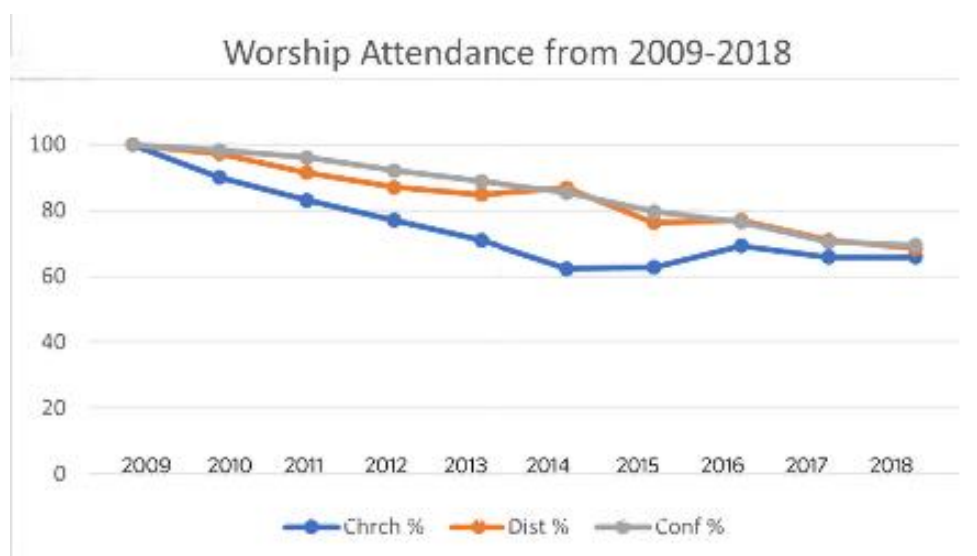


Figure 1. Worship Attendance Reflecting Percentage of Decline, 2009-2018¹²

Despite efforts to alter the path of decline for FUMC by intentionally building momentum, there have still been more goodbye parades for long-time members than

¹¹ Worship Attendance from 2009-2018, a Comparison of Church, District, and Conference attendance, based on data from <http://www.umdata.org/Charts.aspx>.

¹² Worship Attendance Reflecting Percentage of Decline, 2009-2018. This chart provides a comparison of church, district, and conference attendance created based on data from <http://www.umdata.org/Charts.aspx>. The values on the Y-axis reflect the attendance of congregation, district, and conference, each beginning at 100% to demonstrate their similar trajectory despite obvious discrepancies in size. FUMC's average attendance was 231 in 2009, falling to 152 in 2018.

welcome wagons for newcomers and visitors. Nick and I were appointed in July of 2018, and our work to increase attendance and engagement soon became a prolonged effort to move through the Covid-19 pandemic and now through difficult conversations within the United Methodist Church.

Culture Shift

FUMC was known for decades as the “Country Club Church,” with a generous representation of respected business owners, community leaders, and politicians counted among its membership.¹³ While the church today continues to be blessed with strong leaders, the overall culture of the congregation has changed, resulting in a notable loss of clout within the community. The upside to this culture shift is that FUMC has become less intimidating to our community, which is 51% Blue Collar.¹⁴ However, this transition has brought uncertainty regarding our identity as a congregation. In reflecting on this subject, a long-time member suggested that many are wondering, “Who are we now?”¹⁵

To borrow from Andy Stanley, our congregation has discovered that “vision leaks.”¹⁶ In the early 2000s, the appointed pastor sought to lead a Vision Committee within the church to create a new vision statement. When it became clear there was no consensus as to the direction of the church, the pastor wrote the statement himself.¹⁷

¹³ Member of FUMC 5, interviewed by author, Hobbs, November 4, 2020.

¹⁴ This percentage is significant when Hobbs’ 51% Blue Collar makeup is compared with only 38% for the state of New Mexico: *Church Demographics from ExecutiveInsite*, report, 12.

¹⁵ Member of FUMC 6, interviewed by author, Hobbs, November 4, 2020.

¹⁶ Andy Stanley, “Vision Leaks,” *CT Pastors*, (January 1, 2004), <https://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2004/winter/andy-stanley-vision-leaks.html>.

¹⁷ Member of FUMC 6, interviewed by author, Hobbs, November 4, 2020.

Vision is the first element to be lost in the life cycle of a church. As is demonstrated in Figure 2 below, we see that loss of vision moves a congregation from Mature to Empty Nest mode.¹⁸ Despite the loss of vision, FUMC still enjoys warm relationships, functional ministries, and an evident structure, all of which suggest an Empty Nest status. Given the age of the congregation and decades of decline, however, we may be at the tail end of this phase.

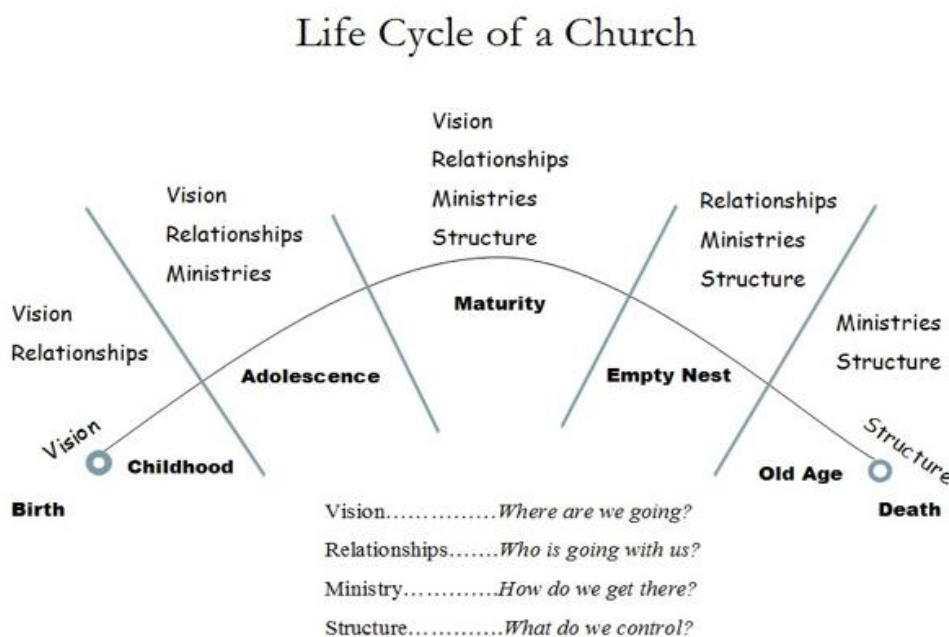


Figure 2. Life Cycle of a Church¹⁹

George Bullard places an additional phase, Retirement, between Empty Nest and Old Age.²⁰ In the Retirement phase, relationships begin to wane. Although relationships continue to be nurtured within the FUMC community, this is not occurring at the rate

¹⁸ Greg Wiens, “A Season for Everything – Life Cycle of a Church,” *Healthy Growing Churches*, May 10, 2018, healthygrowingchurches.com/a-season-for-everything-life-cycle-of-a-church/.

¹⁹ Wiens, “A Season for Everything – Life Cycle of a Church.”

²⁰ George Bullard, “The Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development,” 25, https://media1.razorplanet.com/share/510613-5661/resources/1184488_LifeCycleandStagesofCongregationalDevelopment.pdf

needed to replace the loss of engagement due to retirees moving or the loss of members by death. Long-time friendships continue to bear the fruit of decades of shared discipleship, but opportunities to make new relationships are underutilized.

Another indicator that a congregation is moving into Retirement mode is that members become hesitant to invite others to church, sensing that their beloved church is no longer an ideal place to invite lost, hurting people.²¹ One of the most positive signs of life for our congregation's future came from feedback from a much loved and respected member who commented that she feels like inviting people to church again. Much work has gone into boosting congregational morale and raising the visibility of our congregation, so this serves as much-needed encouragement that we are headed in the right direction. On the flip side, however, this member's relatively recent experience of caution and hesitance in inviting people to church also serves as a reminder that intentional, effective leadership is needed to avoid moving into Retirement.

A warning sign of Retirement mode is the expectation that growth in attendance will be experienced through the same methods that were effective in the past.²² Gary McIntosh writes, "What got your church to where it is will not get it to where you want it to be!"²³ Because our congregation may desire to retrace and repeat the steps that brought us to where we are today, we need a more intriguing, magnetic vision of what is in front of us than what lies behind us.

²¹ Bullard, "The Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development," 25.

²² Bullard, "The Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development," 27.

²³ Gary McIntosh, *Taking Your Church to the Next Level: What Got You Here Won't Get You There* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2009), 10.

Recognizing and accepting our place in the life cycle of a congregation calls for experiencing a crisis of sorts. Being moved to action requires that we feel the discomfort of our current situation. Tony Morgan observes that it is “hard to confirm and even harder to accept” a congregation’s status if it finds itself on the right-hand side of the life cycle.²⁴ As uncomfortable as it may be, the most productive way forward involves speaking the truth and regrouping around a shared mission and vision, without which our congregation may not have the energy and focus needed to regain momentum.²⁵

Culture Gaps

Our congregation is facing two prominent culture gaps. The first culture gap is the cultural distance between our community and church. The second culture gap stands between where our congregation is now and where it used to be. We know who we once were, but we are uncertain who we are today. As FUMC church members become increasingly aware of the ongoing decline in attendance, they will most likely want to do something, but what exactly are they willing to do? Attempts at revitalization can become more of a reversal than renewal.²⁶ The sad reality is that well-meaning, hard-working congregations spin their wheels and spend their energy in futile attempts to reverse the clock without ever moving forward.

Some within our congregation may be tempted to place their focus and energy on bridging the gap between the good old days and today. However, a more productive

²⁴ Tony Morgan, *The Unstuck Church: Equipping Churches to Experience Sustained Health* (Nashville, TN: HarperCollins, 2017), 117–8.

²⁵ McIntosh, *Taking Your Church to the Next Level*, 27.

²⁶ Bullard, “The Life Cycle and Stages of Congregational Development,” 24.

effort will come from bridging the cultural gap between our congregation and community. It is by engaging in mission with the real world around us (not with idealized memories from the past) that we will discover our identity once again. We have a culture gap to bridge, and we must decide whether we will move toward our community in apostolic ministry or retrace our steps into the past.

Although some will understandably mourn aspects of our church culture that have been lost, some of these cultural traits have held us back from engaging in mission that engenders a spirit of mutuality. Some forms of charity can be expressed, most often unintentionally, as an “us vs. them” mindset built on unhealthy dynamics of power and control. Conversely, when disciples engage their mission field with humility and mutual respect, they stand on equal footing with those around them. This type of missional engagement brings transformation for all parties involved.

A Heart for Mission

Even with struggling attendance and waning vision, it is evident that our congregation has a heart for ministry and mission, including generous donations given to help struggling families pay their rent, our food pantry for those experiencing food insecurity, and our soup basket ministry for those recovering from Covid-19, along with our Vacation Bible School, On-Site Prayer, and Fiesta de la Calle Street Party events. These indicators of a missional spirit should not be surprising given that First United Methodist Church was founded in 1919 by a motorcycle riding circuit rider.²⁷

²⁷ Walt Case, *Reflections from our Stained Glass with Historical Notes*, Edited 2019.

FUMC continues to demonstrate an ability to take on large projects, both local and global. Our congregation has taken initiative with mission engagement in Africa through mission trips, generous giving, and building water wells. Church members are also eager to help with local mission needs. Interestingly, our congregation has a history of starting projects in the community and then stepping away when others buy into the mission, which reflects an apostolic impulse.²⁸

Our continued sense of mission is due, in part, to the cultivation of a healthy relationship between FUMC and the Palmer Drug Abuse Program (PDAP) for nearly four decades. Leaders of our local PDAP can tell stories of growing pains as well as triumphs. The recovery center, located on church property, recently gave out eighty-five years' worth of sobriety chips, including chips for sixteen years and seventeen years to individuals who got sober through our local PDAP. This longstanding, healthy relationship between FUMC and PDAP has nurtured empathy and compassion for those struggling with addiction.

PDAP's relationship with FUMC had a rocky start, especially when an older woman had her purse stolen and when PDAP kids mooned the new associate pastor.²⁹ Both entities, however, are thankful to have persevered in building this mutually beneficial relationship. Members of FUMC support the work of PDAP through financial and emotional support, yet there is still sometimes a culture gap when those going through crisis and trauma do not conform to expectations and assumptions.

²⁸ Member of FUMC 3, interviewed by author, Hobbs, November 4, 2020.

²⁹ Member of FUMC 4, interviewed by author, Hobbs, November 4, 2020.

The needs in our community are many, including homelessness and home insecurity. One church leader said of the situation, “We see it, but it’s a secret issue. Many people are within one paycheck of being kicked out of their homes.”³⁰ Another member, who has gifts of compassion and faith, commented that “we just have to be bold and brave enough to step out and do it.”³¹

Vision for the Future

Prophetic power is inherent in discerning and discovering the potential of a region and its people. God has deposited rich resources within the people of FUMC that have yet to be called forth and harnessed for kingdom purposes. It is the work of Ephesians 4 equippers to approach each region, congregation, and individual with reverence and holy expectation of what is possible.

As FUMC moves from a known culture (“country club church”) to a newly defined culture, we will discover wide-open fields of opportunity. We must rediscover and harness the latent power of the Missional DNA of the universal Church and our local congregation to chart new paths and build bridges into our community.³² As Hirsch reminds us, “Our task as his people is to discern what God is doing and join with him. It is not so much that the church has a mission but that the mission has a church.”³³

³⁰ Member of FUMC 3, interviewed by author, Hobbs, November 4, 2020.

³¹ Member of FUMC 4, interviewed by author, Hobbs, November 4, 2020.

³² Alan Hirsch and Dave Ferguson, *On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

³³ Alan Hirsch, Tim Catchim, and Mike Breen, *The Permanent Revolution: Apostolic Imagination and Practice for the 21st Century Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 207.

Mission as Engagement, Not Extraction

As we enter our mission field, it is vital that we develop an understanding of discipling people within their community rather than extracting them from their community. The prevalent mission model ingrained in Western culture is that new converts are pulled out of their community and replanted into an existing congregation.³⁴ Rather than planting the Gospel in a community, newly sprouted Gospel seeds are “rescued” and isolated from their community. This isolation of new disciples, who are the most natural and effective evangelists in their home environments, effectually cuts them off from those with whom they have the most influence. A missional shift is needed whereby new converts remain connected to their network and in which they are raised up as leaders within their own context.³⁵ These emerging leaders are not transplanted to an existing church but are instead equipped through on-the-job training in their natural habitat. This challenges the common assumption that new Christians must receive (endure) years of training before stepping into leadership. In a missional setting, the longer a leader is separated from their community, the less effective they will be in missional leadership.

In seeking to equip FUMC for apostolic mission, we need to shift from the extraction model that seeks to disciple one person at a time in isolation to an engaging model that seeks to disciple the larger community. In this view, the world is not an enemy to be escaped but rather the recipient of God’s good will and intentions.

³⁴ David Watson and Paul Watson, *Contagious Disciple Making: Leading Others on a Journey of Discovery* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 107-8.

³⁵ Watson, *Contagious Disciple Making*, 158.

First United Methodist Church and the Holy Spirit

During my time with the people of FUMC, I have discerned a desire for more of God. Through one-on-one conversations over the past several years, I have seen individuals grow in their relationship with God and openness to the Holy Spirit. Spiritual renewal comes through invitation and relationship, not through pushing people to conform or reform. I have discovered during this season that although I seek to nurture the work of the Spirit, it is God who does the heavy lifting. My focus is on the work of teaching, modeling, and permission-giving. It is God who gives the increase.³⁶

However, the congregation's history related to the Spirit's work has been rocky. According to one church member, the congregation experienced a split in 1970 related to the charismatic renewal of that era.³⁷ A group within the congregation brought in a teacher to lead a class on the Holy Spirit. This leader was not United Methodist, and their approach was considered off-putting and pushy to some people. When I asked how we could avoid causing friction and division when discussing the Holy Spirit today, the church member responded, "Start with being Methodist."³⁸ This confirms that our congregation needs to experience renewal as coming from within rather than from outside influences. Further, it is important to help our members realize that the work of the Spirit is essential to our story as United Methodists.

I asked this church member what the congregation's experience of the Holy Spirit has been in the decades since the split transpired, and they responded, "How about zip?"

³⁶ 1 Corinthians 3:7, King James Version.

³⁷ Member of FUMC 7, interviewed by author, Hobbs, December 15, 2022.

³⁸ Member of FUMC 7, interviewed by author, Hobbs, December 15, 2022.

They went on to clarify that although pastors did discuss the Holy Spirit from time to time, these concepts never made it into the day-to-day conversations and considerations of the laity. The Holy Spirit wasn't really discussed. It was more, "Go to church and go to the Country Club."³⁹ Thankfully, the Holy Spirit became more experientially real to this individual while attending a small group beyond FUMC.

United Methodism and the Holy Spirit

A pervasive issue within United Methodist congregations is that although members desire to serve God, they have received inadequate training to participate in the supernatural ministry of Christ. It is evident from Scripture that Jesus authorized his disciples to engage in the ministry of healing and deliverance, yet these biblical forms of ministry that are wholly dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit have been resisted and even prohibited within much of the Western Church. Additionally, studies and assessments based on spiritual gifts often focus on the gifts that can be accomplished through natural talent or effort, while gifts that are unmistakably Spirit-reliant are treated with hesitancy and skepticism.

A selective rendering of Methodist history has shielded United Methodists from recognizing and claiming our full theological and spiritual heritage. Further, a sidelining of the Holy Spirit and the supernatural occurred as various religious and cultural waves dismissed the value and validity of the work of the Spirit. This includes influences such as the Protestant Reformation, cessationism, and Enlightenment Epistemology. While the

³⁹ Member of FUMC 7, interviewed by author, Hobbs, December 15, 2022.

United Methodist Church does not overtly teach against the Person and work of the Spirit, our silence on these critical cultural influences may speak louder than words.

Based on my experience within United Methodist congregations, a more personal experience of the Holy Spirit is often needed. Further, there are scarce opportunities to be equipped for Spirit-empowered ministry. However, I wanted to see if my personal experience would be reflected by a wider United Methodist audience. Through a straw poll conducted via social media, I received 282 responses to a brief nonscientific survey regarding Spirit-empowered ministry, with 165 United Methodist clergypersons responding and 117 laypersons responding.⁴⁰ To discern the degree to which congregations generally receive intentional teaching on the Holy Spirit, one survey question asked how respondents would describe the denomination's focus on the Holy Spirit. The top two responses were evenly divided (at 44% each), with one group indicating that the Holy Spirit is primarily mentioned in liturgy, prayers, and hymn lyrics and the second group responding that the Holy Spirit is regularly focused on through teachings and sermons. 8% indicated that the Holy Spirit is discussed on Pentecost Sunday, and 4% responded that the Holy Spirit is rarely mentioned or discussed. I have observed that Methodist leaders typically use "Holy Spirit" language when speaking and praying, but that more in-depth teaching regarding the Spirit and supernatural realities is less common.

When respondents were asked if they would be comfortable praying with someone to experience healing, 76% of clergy responded that they would be "ready and

⁴⁰ This nonscientific survey was conducted on Facebook beginning December 5, 2022, using the Mailchimp platform.

willing” to do so, with 10% of clergy indicating that they would be “willing” to pray but would “need more training.” Whereas, only 40% of laity responded that they would be “ready and willing,” with 26% indicating that they would be “willing” to pray if they had more training. It is not surprising that clergypersons identified a greater readiness to pray for healing, given that pastors typically visit congregants to pray for healing.

Nonetheless, participant responses indicate that the laity feel considerably less prepared to pray for healing. Additionally, clergy and laity who did not indicate a willingness to pray for people selected reservations to healing prayer based on being uncertain of God’s will (8%), concern that the person may be disappointed if they are not healed (10%), and discomfort with praying aloud (6%).

In a question designed to discern whether the United Methodists participating in this straw poll see the Spirit as primarily working in overt, obvious ways or more covert, subtle ways, I was surprised that 14% of total respondents selected the option that the Holy Spirit neither works covertly nor overtly, but rather that “We mainly seek to believe in God and follow the example of Jesus.” This response was higher when only laity responses were considered, with 21% answering that they do not see the work of the Holy Spirit demonstrated (covertly or overtly) in United Methodist congregations. This response may indicate a leaning towards deism and humanism by these respondents and within their congregations. Based on my experience within United Methodist congregations and considering the responses to this straw poll, more teaching on the Holy Spirit and Spirit-empowered ministry is needed.

Ministry Journey

A Harvest Calling

The biblical narrative that most effectively connects my personal sense of calling with my ministry context is reflected in Jesus' words to his disciples regarding the harvest: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few'" (Matt. 9:36-37). Jesus' words resonate deeply with me, and it is with growing certainty that I sense God has called me to equip workers for the Lord's harvest. At three unique times in my life, God has supernaturally impressed upon me his divine love and compassion for those who are like sheep without a shepherd. Words cannot convey the intensity and depth of God's compassionate love for people. I am driven to respond to this profound revelation of God's heart by focusing my work on equipping disciples to enter the harvest fields of their communities.

Because harvest work is the Holy Spirit's work, it is meant to be supernatural in nature. Equipping disciples to engage in Spirit-empowered ministry within their context requires the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit whereby disciples exemplify the fruit of the Spirit and demonstrate the gifts of the Spirit.⁴¹

Prioritization of the work of the Spirit is in keeping with United Methodist theology. Thanks to the influence of the Moravians, John Wesley's theology included the

⁴¹ The fruit of the Spirit reflects the character of God, while the gifts of the Spirit demonstrate the power of God. Both are needed for ministry, but different branches of Christianity often focus on one over the other. Further, bearing the fruit of the Spirit is too often attempted through human effort rather than through the indwelling, transforming work of the Spirit.

“witness of the Spirit” and the ensuing experience of Christian assurance.⁴² This focus on Christian experience and the work of the Spirit, though often glossed over in United Methodist circles today, is part of our heritage. John and Charles Wesley experienced a strong move of the Holy Spirit during an all-night prayer meeting with the Fetter Lane Society, which was later referred to as the “Methodist Pentecost.”⁴³ This experience brought about a significant shift in Wesley’s focus from his own salvation to the salvation of others.⁴⁴ The supernatural work of the Holy Spirit not only equips and empowers Christians for ministry, but it reorients their gaze and attention towards those who are like sheep without a shepherd.

My Spiritual Heritage

Though I was raised in charismatic faith circles, I was drawn to join the United Methodist Church in college. My family on both sides were Methodist and Nazarene going back several generations, even boasting Methodist circuit riders in our lineage. My grandmother, Ruth Hightower Norman, accepted Christ while attending a revival service led by her circuit-riding grandfather, J.A. Aaron. J.A. also encouraged my great-grandmother, Agnes Aaron (his daughter-in-law), to serve as a lay preacher within the Methodist Episcopal Church from a young age. Without realizing it, I had absorbed the Wesleyan Arminian theology as part of my family’s theological heritage. When I

⁴² Winfield Bevins, *Marks of a Movement: What the Church Today Can Learn from the Wesleyan Revival* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 51-2.

⁴³ Bevins, *Marks of a Movement*, 87-8.

⁴⁴ Steve Seamands, “Pursuing Pentecost,” *Good News Magazine* (November 23, 2018), <https://goodnewsmag.org/2017/11/pursuing-pentecost>.

“discovered” the United Methodist Church afresh, I appreciated its history, theology, structure, and support of women in ministry.

However, I wasn’t sure how to share my experience of the Holy Spirit within the United Methodist congregations that I pastored. While I encountered a general openness to the work of the Spirit, I was aware that some vocabulary and experiences associated with the Holy Spirit could be off-putting to mainline folks. I spent years discerning how to speak about the Spirit in contextually appropriate ways. I eventually attended a conference hosted by Aldersgate Renewal Ministries, a renewal group within the Wesleyan theological stream that seeks to help people recognize that “John Wesley’s theology of grace is in fact a theology of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁵ I witnessed a beautiful expression of supernatural ministry during the conference that was thoroughly Methodist in nature, both theologically and culturally. This revealed that my experience of the Spirit could be faithfully expressed within the Methodist tradition.

Freedom Ministry

In recent years, I have become bolder and more intentional in sharing liberating spiritual truths during conversations with church members. This directness has emerged in part due to my work with Freedom Ministry, which speaks to subjects such as strongholds, shame, forgiveness, inner vows, and spiritual warfare. Many people carry heavy spiritual baggage that they believe is too ugly to share with others, but God desires them to experience healing. Working with Nita Kuehn, a respected mentor and

⁴⁵ “Who We Are,” Aldersgate Renewal Ministries, <https://aldersgaterenewal.org/about-us-who-we-are>.

apostolically gifted minister, I have adapted Freedom Ministry materials and offered them during a weekend event within a United Methodist congregation. I have also worked with a team of colleagues to provide the content during a retreat setting.⁴⁶

It is unconscionable that so many branches of the Church claim to continue the ministry of Jesus with so little effort to bring freedom to those who are spiritually oppressed. In many cases, we not only fall short of Jesus' example and commands, but we ignore them altogether. Jesus told his followers to "heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give" (Matt. 10:8, NIV). Jesus lived out the prophecy of Isaiah in that he proclaimed good news to the poor, freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight, and set the oppressed free (Isa. 61:1-2 referenced in Luke 4:18-19, NIV). All of this was done to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Many pastors are passionate about proclaiming God's love and favor for our world, yet few expect this message to be accompanied by supernatural healing and deliverance. In many cases, our words are eloquent, and our theology is rich and nuanced, yet our impact within our mission field is lacking. Given that Jesus utilized signs and wonders to accompany his teaching, it is curious that we expect our communication skills to be so effective that we skip over the supernatural altogether.

I have found that many United Methodists are hungry for more of God, and in some cases, they have had supernatural experiences that they are hesitant to share with

⁴⁶ The focus of Freedom Ministry is to bring emotional healing and spiritual freedom to people through the power of the Holy Spirit. Though there are many expressions of this form of ministry, the best-known program is located at Gateway Church in Southlake, TX. Freedom Ministry is based on concepts and materials created by Bob Hamp, a licensed marriage and family therapist and author of several books, including *Think Differently Live Differently: Keys to a Life of Freedom* (Grapevine, TX: Thinking Differently Press, 2016).

others. In pastoral counseling sessions, I have learned that we are about to get to the heart of an issue when an individual says, “You’ll think I’m crazy” or “I know this probably isn’t important, but . . .” That is usually the moment when we move past the presenting issue to the root of the problem or need. Due to a lack of teaching regarding supernatural realities, Christians often ignore and discredit spiritual experiences, sometimes with devastating consequences. The Church should be a safe space to talk about supernatural experiences.

Called to Equip

God has been drawing me to the ministry role of equipper for some time. A pivotal experience came through a three-year continuing education experience in Rebekah Simon-Peter’s Creating a Culture of Renewal (CCR) course. During a discussion of apostleship among our CCR cohort, we read through the familiar passages on the Great Commission and Jesus’ statement that the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. I felt these words stir within as tears came to my eyes. Looking around the table to see my friends and colleagues, I wondered how they could retain their composure when confronted with this divine mandate. Of course, most of us had read and preached this passage numerous times, but at that moment, God spoke directly to me through a more profound awareness that God’s heart is turned toward the harvest, and the heart of the Church must follow.

I currently work in the dual capacity of being appointed as Assistant Director of Congregational Vitality in the New Mexico Conference and as co-pastor of First United Methodist Church of Hobbs, New Mexico. In my conference roles, I focus on

congregational development and serve as chairperson of the New Church Development Team. This is an exciting opportunity to support church plants and established congregations in their harvest ministry.

Rediscovering Our Apostolic Impulse

The Church is meant to exist in a continual apostolic state of sending. While not all Christians are apostolic, the Church is apostolic.⁴⁷ Therefore, the healthy local congregation is apostolic by nature, for it is in the business of equipping and sending representatives of Jesus into the world. Without an apostolic impulse, congregations will hesitate to enter the Lord's harvest.

Alan Hirsch contends that missional movements are reliant upon the presence of apostolic ministry.⁴⁸ This suggests that the vacuum of apostolic leadership in local congregations is a primary reason for the decline in membership and overall vitality, as it is the apostolic influence that equips and catapults congregations into mission. Hirsch further proposes that "The apostolic gift creates the environment of the release and nurture of all other gifts listed in Ephesians 4."⁴⁹ Hirsch is known for his work with the fivefold ministry described in Ephesians 4, which specifies the work of apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds/pastors, and teachers, referred to as APEST.

⁴⁷ We profess our faith through the reading of the Nicene Creed in that "We believe in the one holy catholic and apostolic church." See United Methodist Church, *United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), #880.

⁴⁸ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 187.

⁴⁹ Alan Hirsch and Darryn Altclass, *The Forgotten Ways Handbook: A Practical Guide for Developing Missional Churches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 117.

Christ has given apostolic leaders to the Church to equip disciples in using their unique gifts, resources, and influence with an apostolic impulse. This apostolic spirit can be expressed in many ways, such as entrepreneurial members starting non-profits, relationally gifted members beginning a small group or fresh expression in their workplace, or those with developed spiritual gifts walking into a farmers' market to offer prayer and prophetic words to those who are gathered. Each outreach is apostolic because it propels members into missional activity.

However, apostolically motivated persons often become frustrated by the lack of movement within their congregations and instead opt to use their apostolic gifts elsewhere. Sam Metcalf demonstrates this frustration through his take on apostolic ministry, designating the apostolic, or missionary, form of church (known to many as the parachurch model) as separate from the local parish form of church, stating that “God never designed or intended either to do the work of the other.”⁵⁰ In separating the apostolic, missionary form (sodality) of the church from the local parish form (modality), Metcalf states: “Apostolic leaders thrive best in structures uniquely designed for the fulfillment of their calling, and these leaders must have access to such structures in order to reach their God-given potential.”⁵¹ It is both telling and tragic that apostolic leaders such as Metcalf find the structure of local churches to be unsuitable for apostolic callings.

It is understandable that apostles would look for other avenues to fulfill their calling when already existing congregational structures are resistant to the very work and nature of apostolic ministry. However, Metcalf has elevated the importance of apostolic

⁵⁰ Sam Metcalf, *Beyond the Local Church: How Apostolic Movements Can Change the World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 28.

⁵¹ Metcalf, *Beyond the Local Church*, 28.

liberty to achieve self-actualization over the apostolic responsibility of equipping people for ministry. While I agree with Metcalf that some apostolic ministries are most effectively fulfilled within a non-traditional ministry structure and that traditional parishes should honor those structures as equal partners in the work of the Church, I disagree with his view that this is meant to be the norm rather than the exception. When apostolic leaders are prayerfully sent from a local congregation to work within a non-traditional ministry, this sending should feel like a celebratory birthing. Metcalf's language, however, casts this more in the light of a prison break. Such an attitude may stem from wounds and rejection experienced within risk-averse congregations.

Where there is a lack of apostolic mission, there will also be a scarcity of supernatural ministry. The gifts of the Spirit, including healing, deliverance, signs, and wonders, demonstrate the Gospel of Christ to the world. Supernatural ministry is meant to accompany apostolic ministry.⁵² While supernatural ministry can operate within an inward-focused congregation, I have discovered that church members sometimes feel selfish in seeking the miraculous provision of God for their own needs. However, if an apostolic heart for mission could be stirred within such individuals and congregations, along with theology that affirms the work of the Spirit, they would begin to stand in the gap to seek supernatural intervention for their communities.

⁵² The Apostle Paul lists signs, wonders, and miracles as the mark of a true apostle. Ought this not also be the mark of apostolic ministry? See 2 Corinthians 12:12, New International Version.

Holy Dissatisfaction

I have entered a season of holy dissatisfaction with “church as usual.” Though I have enough experience in the local church to know what congregants expect of me, I desire more. Despite the pressure to go with the flow and keep everyone happy, I am unwilling to surrender to the tide of cultural expectations. God has called the Church to fulfill a grander vision, and God is calling me to equip the Church for ministry aligned with the ministry of Jesus.

In my experience of ministering in United Methodist congregations within New Mexico, Texas, Ohio, and Kentucky, I have found that faithful church members are often hesitant to engage their surrounding communities through the presence and power of the Spirit. These loving, generous followers of Jesus desire to reach beyond their local congregations, but in many cases, they have neither the tools nor the support to do so. Uncertainty and feelings of insecurity cause them to step back so that more “qualified” persons, usually professional clergy, can step forward.

I am thankful for the work of organizations such as Fresh Expressions for countering this faulty assumption by equipping laity and clergy alike to bring new forms of Christian community into their schools, workplaces, and neighborhood hangouts. However, members engaging in mission work often separate efforts to meet practical, physical needs from spiritual nurture and supernatural transformation. It has become customary for church folk to do practical, helpful work outside the church building while reserving spiritual work for inside the church building. If these faithful followers of Jesus dared to bring the spiritual into their ordinary, everyday world, they would discover that a dynamic synergy occurs when the natural and supernatural collide. This fusion of

supernatural power and human need is characteristic of Jesus' ministry, as recounted in the Gospel narratives.

I am deeply concerned that members of United Methodist congregations are ill-equipped to engage their communities and make disciples. This is reflected by the continued decline of membership, attendance, and professions of faith within the denomination. The problem is not the harvest itself, as Jesus promised that a bumper crop awaits us. The problem is the lack of harvesters. In Ephesians 4:11, we are told that Christ gave apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers "to equip the saints for the work of ministry." Jesus has assured us that the harvest is plentiful; it is our job to pray for workers and then equip the workers whom God provides.

Conclusion: Connecting the Dots and Next Steps

Faithful, hard-working congregations across the United States are experiencing declining attendance and engagement. Good intentions are commendable, but they are not enough. God has provided the presence, power, and gifts of the Spirit needed for our local congregation to engage our mission field apostolically. Because harvest work relies upon the Spirit's work, it is imperative that the people of First United Methodist Church of Hobbs be equipped for Spirit-empowered ministry. As we dare to follow God's heart into the mission field, we will attempt that which can only be accomplished in God's own strength. Because God is far more invested in this work than we could ever comprehend, I have confidence that God will show up to meet us in the field.

The following chapters will build a foundation for understanding and reclaiming Spirit-empowered ministry in the United Methodist Church today. The lack of Spirit-

empowered workers for a post-Christendom mission field is caused by cognitive and affective barriers to the supernatural. I intend to demonstrate that a process for leading followers of Jesus to reclaim the validity and availability of the supernatural through a *metanoia* of heart and mind will provide a readiness to participate freely in the supernatural ministry of Jesus.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The United Methodist Church struggles with equipping and sending disciples to implement the mission of Jesus. The stagnation and decline experienced within our denomination bear witness to our failure to fruitfully continue the mission of Christ.¹ Our meager results stem not from a lack of effort but from a poor understanding of the mission of Jesus and of our authority to continue that mission in the world today. The nature of this mission will be considered through careful study of the words of Jesus as found in Matt. 9:35-10:1. This passage conveys profound compassion, practical urgency, righteous judgment, and supernatural authorization. The bountiful harvest to which Jesus refers in Matt. 9:37, along with the ensuing authorization of the twelve disciples to enter the harvest, indicates that God desires to provide the solution to our missional quandary by commissioning and empowering disciples to bring healing and deliverance to their mission fields. As will be revealed through an exegetical study of this passage, the

¹ Heather Hahn, “US dips below majority of membership,” *UM News*, November 25, 2019, <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/us-dips-below-majority-of-membership>. Membership in the UMC was declining by 2% annually as of 2019. This does not include the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on attendance. See Aaron Earls, “Some Previous Churchgoers Are Still Mission Post-COVID,” *Lifeway Research*, June 3, 2022, <https://research.lifeway.com/2022/06/03/some-previous-churchgoers-are-still-missing-post-covid/>.

mission of the Church is thoroughly supernatural. Therefore, models for equipping disciples must align with the spiritual DNA of this mission.

The secularization of mission into a humanistic effort today runs contrary to the supernatural nature of mission as modeled by Jesus. This shift stems from mission being reoriented around serving the world's agenda in place of a more transcendent and eternal mission.² Christian mission is the initiative of God in the world, but our expression of that mission can become so diminished that it instead reflects our lesser priorities, judgments, and knee-jerk responses. The concept of Christian mission has become nebulous, encompassing everything from global evangelism to bake sales. Bishop Stephen Neill asserts, "If everything is mission, nothing is mission. If everything the church does is to be classed as 'mission,' we shall need to find another term for the church's particular responsibility for . . . those who have never yet heard the Name of Christ."³

In his article, "Missiology Faces the Lion," Donald McGavran describes two distinct understandings of mission: that which is primarily discipleship-focused or evangelistic and that which focuses on humanitarian efforts to improve quality of life.⁴ In the early 1970s, the World Council of Churches adopted this secularization of mission, expressing the mission of the church primarily through works of humanization and liberation.⁵ For McGavran, the lion which "stands ready to kill and eat all true

² Stephen B. Bevans et al., *The Mission of the Church: Five Views in Conversation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 13.

³ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (New York, NY: Penguin, 1964), 81.

⁴ Donald A. McGavran, "Missiology Faces the Lion," *Missiology: An International Review* 17, no. 3 (1989): 339, <https://journals-sagepub-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/doi/pdf/10.1177/009182968901700308>.

⁵ Bevans, *The Mission of the Church: Five Views in Conversation*, 13.

missiologists” is a reduction of mission to a pluralistic mission expressed through works of service over the foundational call of Christ to make disciples of all nations.⁶

Similarly, the great threat to the mission of the Church today is the belief that Jesus’ mission can be fulfilled through human effort alone. The commissioning of the disciples in Matt. 10:1 is explicitly supernatural in nature. As much of the Western Church has abdicated the authority of Christ for supernatural ministry, it’s hardly surprising that our work has been boiled down to that which can be accomplished in our own strength. Neither can we be surprised that this ministry has failed to capture the attention of our world as an authoritative witness to Jesus Christ.

In the mid-twentieth century, the theological grounding of the *Missio Dei* (Mission of God) helped the evangelical and ecumenical branches of the Church come together in a shared vision of mission.⁷ The concept of the *Missio Dei* began to transform the view of mission from an expression of human effort to an experience of divine activity.⁸ Matt. 9:35-10:1 reinforces the concept of *Missio Dei* in that God is the principal player in mission. God’s heart of compassion motivates mission, and God’s sovereign act to commission, authorize, and send disciples initiates that mission.

At this point, it is important to acknowledge the breadth of mission reflected in Scripture and commanded specifically by Christ. Christian ministry includes acts of mercy, generosity, and sacrifice. Within the United Methodist Church, these are the works most often associated with Christian mission. However, upon reading the Gospel

⁶ McGavran, “Missiology Faces the Lion,” 341.

⁷ Bevans, *The Mission of the Church: Five Views in Conversation*, 12.

⁸ Bevans, *The Mission of the Church: Five Views in Conversation*, 12.

accounts of the commissioning of the disciples, Jesus commands the twelve disciples (and, by extension, the Church today) to do uniquely supernatural works. This supernatural element of mission reminds us that mission is chiefly God's mission. It flows from the heart and will of God, and it is only accomplished as God's own purpose is performed in God's own power. We must recognize the innate supernatural quality of mission so that we may present and embody this fuller picture of Christian ministry.

It is tempting to reduce the sprawling supernatural landscape of God's mission into a small vignette that we can grasp. Jesus has invited us on a grand adventure, but we gravitate again and again to that which is safe and familiar. This can be seen in the temptation to remain in our cloistered sacred spaces as well as in our desire to limit the scope of our work to that which can be accomplished in our own strength. Whether extending mission beyond the boundary lines of our church facilities or offering expressions of ministry that require a spiritual power and authority beyond our ability, living out the mission of Jesus calls us to embrace a larger, riskier understanding of Christian mission. Our familiar ministries rooted in service, fellowship, and nurture are part of the mission of the Church, but they are only slices of a larger mission. Jesus' commissioning and authorization of his disciples stretch us to embrace this grander vision.

As we shall see in Matthew's account, Jesus commissions the disciples, giving them authority to cast out unclean spirits and to cure every disease. In comparing Matthew's narrative with the remaining Synoptic Gospels, we find that in Mark's account, Jesus gives the twelve authority over unclean spirits, and in Luke, Jesus gives them power and authority to drive out demons and to cure diseases (Matt. 10:1; Mark 6:7,

13; Luke 9:1-2).⁹ In the Gospel of John, which characteristically varies from the Synoptic narratives, Jesus reserves the sending of the twelve until after his resurrection when he breathes on them so that they may “Receive the Holy Spirit” (John 20:21-22). This Spirit-infused experience is not immediately implemented through deliverance and healing ministry (though Jesus performs both works in the Gospel of John) but by a surprising extension of Jesus’ forgiveness of sins (John 20:23). While John’s account of the sending of the disciples differs from that depicted in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the link between all four accounts is that healing, deliverance, and forgiveness are supernatural. Their work is wholly dependent upon the power and authority of God.

With this understanding of the mission of God and the commissioning of the disciples to that same mission, we turn to our primary text for a more particular knowledge of mission through the lens of the Gospel of Matthew. Through the exegesis of this text, we will gain a greater understanding of the passage and its implications.

Exegetical Research of Matthew 9:35-10:1

Historical Context

The placement of Matthew as the first book of the New Testament is appropriate, given that it served as a favorite within early catholic Christianity. This is evidenced by the fact that it was the most quoted Gospel narrative of the Early Church Fathers.¹⁰ As is

⁹ While Mark only specifies that Jesus gives the disciples authority over unclean spirits in Mark 6:7, it should be noted that the disciples are depicted as anointing with oil and curing many who were sick in Mark 6:13. I would suggest that there is an implied commissioning to the work of healing.

¹⁰ M. Eugene Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” in *The New Interpreter's Bible: New Testament Articles Matthew-Mark*, ed. Leander E. Keck, vol. 8 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 89.

the case for each of the four Gospels, Matthew is a “*literary* work to interpret the *theological* meaning of a concrete *historical* event.”¹¹ Matthew draws exclusively from Jewish and Christian sources, including the Septuagint, Apocrypha, Gospel of Mark, and the hypothetical Q document, to prove that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures.¹²

This Gospel was written in the context of the Christian community of Matthew’s day. Interestingly, it is the only Gospel to use the word “church,” yet it remains the most thoroughly Jewish of the Gospels.¹³ Matthew’s text views Jesus as the fulfillment of the Jewish heritage and faith while also challenging Jewish religious leaders, condemning them as “hypocrites” and “blind guides.”¹⁴ Some may see these divergent emphases as conflicting with one another; however, this dual-focus is appropriate if we view Matthew as a reformer. Those residing within a movement have the most authority to critique it. However, Matthew demonstrates that it is not merely the role of a reformer to critique the old but also to reclaim and advance the best of a tradition bringing out treasures, both new and old (Matt. 13:52).

Matthew’s unique contribution to our understanding of Jesus’ ministry includes a focus on teaching, an emphasis on mission, the importance of righteousness, and the expectation that particular works on a small scale accomplish universal mission.¹⁵ These

¹¹ Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 89.

¹² Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 94-5.

¹³ Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 97.

¹⁴ Donald Senior, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: Matthew* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 23.

¹⁵ Michael Joseph Brown, “Matthew,” in *True to Our Native Land: An African American New Testament Commentary*, ed. Brian K. Blount (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 86.

themes resonate with the Wesleyan focus on discipleship and holiness, as well as with the culture of service found in many United Methodist congregations. Additionally, Matthew intentionally edits Markan material to focus on Jesus as healer rather than as exorcist.¹⁶

Kim Paffenroth identifies several examples: “[Matthew] minimizes the exorcistic elements in some stories, making them into more generalized healings; he turns accounts of Jesus’ teaching into accounts of his healing; and he summarizes Jesus’ ministry as one of ‘teaching and healing’ rather than ‘teaching and casting out demons.’”¹⁷

The Structure

Our Scripture focus of 9:35-10:1 succeeds four chapters in which Jesus’ authority is established as teacher (chapters 5-7) and as healer (chapters 8-9), thus demonstrating the authority of Christ in both word and deed.¹⁸ The transitional summary of Jesus’ ministry in 9:35, along with 4:23, form a bracketed inclusio around this section.¹⁹ These parallel statements (differing only in that 9:35 replaces “all Galilee” with “all the cities and villages”) describe the itinerant ministry of Jesus as including teaching, proclamation, and healing. Dorothy Jean Weaver identifies an internal unity in 9:35-10:5a, established by a sequence of finite verbs describing Jesus’ actions: Jesus goes

¹⁶ Kim Paffenroth, “Jesus as Anointed and Healing Son of David in the Gospel of Matthew,” *Biblica* 80, no. 4 (1999): 548-9, <https://www-jstor-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/stable/pdf/42614226.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A6d021ec0555f41581f286a1d6269b46c>.

¹⁷ Paffenroth, “Jesus as Anointed and Healing Son of David in the Gospel of Matthew,” 549.

¹⁸ Anna Case-Winters, *Matthew*, A Theological Commentary on the Bible (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 124.

¹⁹ David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 262.

about (9:35), takes compassion (9:36), speaks (9:37), gives authority (10:1), and sends out (10:5a).²⁰

Eugene Boring's structure differs slightly in that he includes 9:35 as the final verse in the larger segment of 4:23-9:35 (which focuses on the authority of the Messiah), with 9:35 serving as a transition before the next segment, 9:36-10:42 (in which the disciples are authorized and sent).²¹ However, 9:35 may be viewed as leading into the Missionary Discourse in chapter 10 due to the passage's encapsulation of the missional authority of Jesus, the motivation at the heart of that mission, and the sharing of missional authority with the twelve. The rapid movement from Jesus' mission to the disciples' mission within five verses demonstrates the immediacy of this work.

The Miraculous Ministry of Jesus: Matthew 9:35

The miraculous works of Jesus are a fulfillment of the prophetic expectation of the age of salvation which will accompany the kingdom of God.²² In responding to John the Baptist's question regarding whether Jesus is, in fact, the one for whom they have waited, Jesus' answer details his miraculous works as evidence that the messianic expectation is being fulfilled (Matt.11:2-6). Stanley Hauerwas brings together Jesus' miraculous healing ministry with his offering of forgiveness under the umbrella of restoration, in that "Jesus simply acts as one ready to forgive sins as well as heal the

²⁰ Dorothy Jean Weaver, *Matthew's Missionary Discourse: A Literary-Critical Analysis* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 75.

²¹ Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 121.

²² Blaine Charette, "A Harvest for the People? An Interpretation of Matthew 9:37f," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 12, no. 38 (January 1990): 32, <https://journals-sagepub-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/doi/10.1177/0142064X9001203803>.

body. Both sickness and sin are evil realities, neither of which should be part of God's good creation. Jesus has come to restore creation; healing the sick, exorcising demons, and forgiving sins are all acts of restoration."²³

Matt. 9:35 associates healing and deliverance with Jesus' proclamation of the kingdom, and within five verses, Jesus authorizes the disciples to do the work of miracles and proclamation. Matthew includes more miracles than any other Gospel, with twenty specific miracles narrated and numerous mentioned in summary.²⁴ Boring writes, "Miracles cannot be regarded as incidental and relegated to the margin, for they are woven into the texture of the Gospel fabric. Whoever will interpret the Gospels has no option but to come to terms with miracles."²⁵ Ulrich Luz asserts the crucial role of miracles not only in the ministry of Jesus, but in establishing the Church (while also confronting the ingrained condescension of those who dismiss the significance of miracles):

The authority of the disciples to perform miracles . . . is eminently important for the formation of the church. If miracles are regarded as a peculiarity that was necessary only at the beginning of the church's history because uneducated fishermen had to proclaim a new truth to the entire world, then we have missed, or at least repressed, something that is fundamental for Matthew.²⁶

²³ Stanley Hauerwas, *Matthew*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 176.

²⁴ Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 241.

²⁵ Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 244.

²⁶ Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 8-20: A Commentary*, Hermenia, ed. Helmut Koester (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 65.

The Compassion of Christ, the True Shepherd: Matthew 9:36

While the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18-20) is often considered the preeminent passage on mission, the Great Compassion (Matt. 9:36) is also of immense importance in describing the nature of mission. Matthew incorporates a recurring motif in which Jesus is “moved with compassion” for the crowds,²⁷ with each instance leading to a supernatural act through which Jesus meets the presenting need. Compassion serves as the motivating factor for Jesus in Matt. 9:36, in which the Greek word *esplangchnisthē* for compassion refers to feeling deeply,²⁸ or even to the stirring of one’s bowels.²⁹

Jesus goes on to speak of the crowds as oppressed (*skyllo*) and thrown to the ground (*rhipto*), or “harassed and helpless” in the NRSV.³⁰ It is not only the need of the crowds which stirs compassion within Jesus, but also their distress caused by a lack of leadership, for the crowds are “like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt. 9:36). Matthew likely intends for the reader to recall Ezek. 34, a passage of prophetic judgment on the failed leadership of Israel and the revelation of God as the true shepherd.³¹ God goes so far as to say in verse 10, “I am against the shepherds; and I will demand my sheep at their hand...” (Ezek. 24:10). The compassion of God as described in Ezek. 34 is a justice-based compassion that dispenses both provision and judgment. Jesus’ compassion is

²⁷ Senior, *Matthew*, 112. For examples in which Jesus is moved with compassion, see 14:14, 15:32, and 20:34; also compare with the parable of the unforgiving servant (unique to Matthew), in which the same verb is used to describe a king’s compassion for an indebted servant.

²⁸ William Foxwell Albright and C.S. Mann, *Matthew*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 114.

²⁹ Senior, *Matthew*, 112. The bowels were viewed as the source of emotions.

³⁰ Brown, “Matthew,” 98.

³¹ Case-Winters, *Matthew*, 138.

revealed through fierce devotion to the sheep and resolute judgment against false shepherds.

Matt. 9:36 further conveys the gravity of the situation through the imagery of a predator mangling its prey.³² Ben Witherington interprets Jesus' description as pointing to leaders who are devouring their flock rather than feeding and protecting them.³³ For Matthew, Jesus' compassion reflects not only worry due to the lostness of sheep but concern for their vulnerability among false shepherds.³⁴

In addition to demonstrating selfish leadership, the Sadducees, Pharisees, scribes, and elders of Matthew's context functionally reinforced the rule of Rome.³⁵ Matthew's later treatment of the metaphor of sheep and shepherd in 18:12-14 (the parable of the lost sheep) may echo Jesus' critique of Israel's leaders.³⁶ Those who resist and reject Jesus do so to protect satanic structures that uphold their way of life. From the Jewish leaders of Jesus' day upholding and enforcing the power of their Roman oppressors to the townspeople asking Jesus to leave when they discover that the overturning of oppression is bad for business (Matt. 8:28-34), the rejection of Christ seems to be proportionate with the degree to which personal well-being and station relies on anti-Christ structures.

³² Turner, *Matthew*, 262-3.

³³ Ben Witherington, *Matthew*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2006), 207.

³⁴ This is not a warm and fuzzy compassion but rather a fierce compassion. This shifts our understanding of harvest from focusing only on rescuing people from a state of lostness to a vigilant mode of combatting the spiritual forces of wickedness and calling out the false shepherds who lead the sheep astray. The shepherd's compassion is fierce; compassion recognizes and names the source of danger.

³⁵ Case-Winters, *Matthew*, 123.

³⁶ Senior, *Matthew*, 113.

Matthew presents Jesus as the true shepherd of Israel (2:6; 26:31), depicted in 8:36 through Jesus' compassion for the helpless, hurting flock, as well as his critique of the shepherds-in-name-only who left the sheep vulnerable to danger.³⁷ Another indicator of Jesus' status as the true shepherd may be seen in the simple fact that the crowds continue to follow him. A leader is proven a leader when people follow, and a shepherd is proven a shepherd when the flock is protected and nurtured. Jesus demonstrates that he is both an effective leader and a good shepherd.

In the ancient Near East, "shepherd" did not convey the soft sentiment that some may associate with the term today. Rather, it referred to the absolute authority of kings.³⁸ Jesus' compassion as demonstrated in Matt. 9:36 echoes Moses' concern (and implied responsibility) in asking God to appoint a shepherd for Israel in Num. 27:15-17.³⁹ The Lord responds in verses 19-20, telling Moses to commission and share some of his authority with Joshua, providing a parallel between the commissioning of Joshua as successor and the commissioning of the disciples in Matt. 10:1.

In Matthew (as well as in Luke), Jesus is moved with a compassion that is expressed specifically through healing.⁴⁰ If the compassion of Jesus is repeatedly linked with miraculous healings, one may conclude that the commissioning of the twelve in 10:1 to perform miracles also calls for the disciples to share the compassion of Christ.

³⁷ Also see Jeremiah 23:1 for a warning to shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep, as well as Jeremiah 10:7 for reference to "the LORD, the true pasture."

³⁸ Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 252. See Isaiah 44:28.

³⁹ Boring, "The Gospel of Matthew," 252. Also see 1 Kings 22:17 and Ezekiel 34:5.

⁴⁰ Paffenroth, "Jesus as Anointed and Healing Son of David in the Gospel of Matthew," 549. Compare with Mark, in which compassion leads Jesus to teach the crowds (Mark 6:34). In detailing Jesus' response to the crowds, Matthew and Luke redact Markan material into one of healing (compare Mark 10:1 with Matthew 19:2).

Mixed Metaphors: Shepherding and Harvesting in Matthew 9:36-37

Matthew presents two back-to-back agricultural metaphors, shepherding and harvesting, which raise themes of mercy and judgment.⁴¹ Livestock and crops must be nurtured, tended, and to the degree possible, protected. The agricultural metaphors used by Jesus represent a way of life entwined with that which is brought forth on the land. Each metaphor speaks to the value and vulnerability of kingdom work.

Jesus' compassion for Israel is expressed through metaphors of sheep/shepherd and harvest/harvesters, both of which would have been understood eschatologically.⁴² The juxtaposition of metaphors provides complementary and contrasting themes of compassion and judgment.⁴³ Luz observes, "We are confronted here by one of the major problems in understanding the entire Gospel: How are the merciful shepherd and the Lord of judgment—Son of man—to be understood together."⁴⁴ Jesus' shepherd imagery in 9:36 expresses the compassion of Christ for the vulnerable flock. However, it also conveys implicit judgment of false shepherds. Jesus' harvest imagery in 9:37 can be interpreted as expressing themes of both judgment and blessing. We may draw from the OT understanding of harvest as a bestowal of blessing and favor (as in Hosea 6:11), while the overall view of harvest imagery in Matthew is concerned with judgment, specifically the separation of good and evil.

⁴¹ Luz, *Matthew* 8-20, 65.

⁴² Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 252.

⁴³ Luz, *Matthew* 8-20, 65.

⁴⁴ Luz, *Matthew* 8-20, 65.

Looking ahead to chapter 10, Jesus' instructions to the disciples regarding the carrying out of harvest also bear a weight of judgment and blessing. In this second Mission Discourse, the disciples' presence in cities and homes is depicted as conveying judgment, whether through a blessing of peace or through shaking the dust from their feet (Matt. 10:14). People groups will either be deemed worthy based on their response to the disciples or discover that "it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment" than for the community that rejects the ministry of the disciples (Matt. 10:15).

Both the shepherding and harvesting metaphors of Jesus convey a sense of blessing and judgment. They can be understood as two sides of the same coin. In Matt. 9:36-37, these metaphors display themes of judgment and blessing as an interwoven tapestry in which the complete picture may only be seen when the two realities are embraced together.

A Bumper Crop: Matthew 9:37

Jesus expresses his salvific work through the imagery of harvest.⁴⁵ Jo Ann Cavallo posits, "In the Gospel of Matthew, the earth provides the stage where the process of salvation is played out, and the earthly cycle of the seed and the harvest is a basic metaphor for that process."⁴⁶ Jesus' reference to the harvest is ambiguous in that the Greek word *therismos*, like the Hebrew word *qatsar*, can refer to harvest time as well as

⁴⁵ Jo Ann Cavallo, "Agricultural Imagery in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Truth," *Religion & Literature* 24, no. 3 (1992): 28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40059528>.

⁴⁶ Cavallo, "Agricultural Imagery in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Truth," 28.

to that which is harvested.⁴⁷ Dieter T. Roth surmises that the parable of harvest (as found in Q and each of the Synoptic Gospels) is not focused on “the *time* or *nearness* of the harvest, but rather the size of the harvest. The harvest is πολὺς.”⁴⁸ The impetus of Matt. 9:17 is primarily seen in the tension between the plentiful harvest and the paucity of workers. While the timing of harvest may not be the focal point, the urgency to save the abundant harvest from ruin is front and center. Roth continues:

The emphasis is not on a need existing because the harvest is near, but rather because the harvest is large. In other words, the (eschatological) time of the harvest is simply a given, and it seems that one could legitimately assume that the parable implies that if the harvest were smaller the few workers might be sufficient, but since the harvest is large more workers are needed.⁴⁹

The primary challenge is determining whether Jesus is referring to a harvest of blessing or judgment.⁵⁰ Blaine Charette points to two examples of harvest as judgment found in Matt. 3:11-12 and 13:30, 37-39.⁵¹ In both cases, the wheat is gathered, and the chaff or weeds are burned. Interestingly, the role of the harvest workers in 9:37 may begin a work that angels will later fulfill in 13:39.⁵² The harvest judgment completed by the angels in 13:41-42 echoes John the Baptist’s fire imagery from 3:10-12.

⁴⁷ Charette, “A Harvest for the People?,” 29.

⁴⁸ Dieter T. Roth, “Missionary Ethics in Q 10:2-12,” *HTS Theological Studies* 68, no 1 (2012): 2, file:///C:/Users/pasto/Downloads/Missionary_Ethics_in_Q_102-12.pdf.

⁴⁹ Roth, “Missionary Ethics in Q 10:2-12,” 2.

⁵⁰ Charette, “A Harvest for the People?,” 29. Examples of harvest as blessing or promise are seen in Amos 9:13-15, Psalm 126:6, and Isaiah 9:2-3; examples of harvest as judgment are seen in Isaiah 17:4-5, Jeremiah 51:33, Joel 3:13, and Amos 8:2.

⁵¹ Charette, “A Harvest for the People?,” 30.

⁵² Charette, “A Harvest for the People?,” 30.

Despite the obvious parallels between chapters 3 and 13, it is questionable whether John the Baptist's promise of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire in 3:11-12 belongs exclusively within the category of judgment. Unlike the example in chapter 13, in which the weeds are definitively described as "children of the evil one," John focuses on the burning of chaff as an outflow of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. To apply Wesleyan theology to an ancient text, this could be understood as a personal experience of sanctification, in which judgment brings purification from internal "chaff" rather than condemnation of an individual or group of people. Through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christ-followers, temporal judgment bears the fruit of eternal blessing. Despite this consideration, John the Baptist's language indeed conveys a strong tone of judgment in that "His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matt. 3:12).

Notwithstanding Matthew's use of harvest judgment imagery elsewhere, it is important to note that Matthew sometimes varies his use of metaphors.⁵³ Further, if we interpret 9:37 in light of the text which immediately surrounds it, especially the compassionate tone of the passage, we will lean toward viewing it as a harvest of blessing. The more commonly held view of Matt. 9:37 as a missionary call brings together the understanding that it refers to an eschatological event of final ingathering while also responding to the needs of the helpless flock of 9:36.⁵⁴ Only verses later, in 10:6, Jesus will send the newly commissioned and empowered disciples to the lost sheep

⁵³ Charette, "A Harvest for the People?," 30. Compare "sons/children of the kingdom" in 8:12 with 13:38.

⁵⁴ Charette, "A Harvest for the People?," 30.

of Israel. This perhaps indicates that Jesus is sending them to his people as an extension of his own role as shepherd.⁵⁵

Another option for determining the connotation of harvest in 9:37 is that the meaning may shift based on timing: the evil and righteous are separated at the close of the age, while believers are gathered in the historical present.⁵⁶ Based on this criteria, 9:37 may primarily refer to an ingathering of God's people based on the urgency for the present harvest and Jesus' concern for his sheep one verse earlier in 9:36, presumably with the desire to gather his flock. This would support the general perception that Matt. 9:36-38 expresses an implicit call to gather the helpless flock and an explicit call to gather the fully ripened crop.

In his thorough treatment of Matt. 9:37f, however, Charette challenges the assumption that these agricultural metaphors share a parallel emphasis on the gathering of people. Charette asserts that while the "picture of Jesus as a shepherd gathering the lost of Israel is rooted in OT eschatological expectation, the same cannot be said of the picture of a harvest of the people of God being gathered in as a harvest."⁵⁷ In his view, Jesus is not focused on presenting two examples of the work of gathering, but instead on two unique events: the eschatological gathering of Israel and the accompanying harvest of

⁵⁵ Charette, "A Harvest for the People?," 31. For examples of Jesus as messianic shepherd, see Jeremiah 31:10 and Ezekiel 34:23.

⁵⁶ Cavallo, "Agricultural Imagery in the Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Truth," 32.

⁵⁷ Charette, "A Harvest for the People?," 31.

blessing.⁵⁸ Charette states succinctly, “Matthew is not thinking in terms of a harvest of the people but rather in terms of a harvest for the people.”⁵⁹

While Charette’s assessment is interesting, it remains doubtful that Jesus’ discussion of the harvest is focused primarily on the concept of blessing rather than on people. Certainly, Jesus’ miraculous works signal the inbreaking of the kingdom of God and its accompanying blessings. However, humanity is the focus of Jesus’ mission. In the harvest narrative in Matthew 13, for instance, it is people who are judged to be children of the kingdom or children of the evil one. To reference another Gospel, Jesus says in John 3:35, “Look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting.” This is said in the context of many Samaritans believing in Jesus, indicating that the white fields represent people. Of course, returning to Jesus’ compassion for the crowds and his reference to harassed and helpless sheep, the focus of this particular passage seems to be rooted in a concern for people. Any interpretation that removes this central focus misses the mark.

Ask the Boss: Matthew 9:38

An intriguing aspect of this text is that, despite concern over the state of harvest in another person’s field, it is simply not proper protocol to charge into their field to remedy the situation.⁶⁰ Instead, appropriate channels of authority must be followed and respected, as is observed through Jesus’ command to “ask the Lord of the harvest to send out

⁵⁸ Charette, “A Harvest for the People?,” 31.

⁵⁹ Charette, “A Harvest for the People?,” 32.

⁶⁰ Roth, “Missionary Ethics in Q 10:2-12,” 2.

laborers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:38). Those familiar with this text know that the very disciples who pray for laborers become the first fruits answer to that prayer.

It may be inferred that the imperative to petition the Chief Harvester⁶¹ reveals not an unwillingness to send workers, but a recognition that the fruit of the harvest belongs to the Lord.⁶² We see the protective nature of Jesus, the Shepherd, echoed in the implied protective nature of the Lord of the harvest. Whether we interpret this fruit as representing people or as God’s eschatological blessings, it seems that God is solicitous of how that fruit is harvested.

The call to beseech the Boss regarding the need for harvest workers also introduces the concept of authority, though the term is not explicitly mentioned in this verse. The imperative to ask for more workers is soon rejoined by Jesus’ commissioning of, and sharing authority with, the twelve.⁶³ In praying that God will send laborers into the harvest, we are asking the Chief Harvester to share authority so that commissioned harvest hands may enter and productively work within the field.

It is not uncommon for teachers and preachers to focus on the importance of praying for the harvest, as well as on our willingness to be sent as agents of harvest, all the while missing the centrality of the initiative of the Chief Harvester. While action on our part as disciples is important, we should remember that this action is dependent in

⁶¹ Albright, *Matthew*, 114.

⁶² Roth, “Missionary Ethics in Q 10:2-12,” 2-3.

⁶³ Roth, “Missionary Ethics in Q 10:2-12,” 3.

nature. Our dependence is seen in prayer as well as in our reliance upon being commissioned with authority to work in the fields.⁶⁴

Though it may be counterintuitive, it is in understanding our absolute dependence upon God that we are best prepared to exercise our God-given authority to perform miracles. The temptation of many Christians to eagerly roll up their sleeves and get to work—before praying and receiving authorized admission—leads to efforts that can be accomplished in our own strength. We then wonder why we see so few kingdom results. An additional implication of our dependence upon receiving permission and empowerment from the Chief Harvester is that, should any uncommissioned entity seek to meddle with God’s harvest (whether human or demonic), we should act as authorized individuals in ushering out those who have no legal bearing to reap (or, more likely, sow tares) in the field.

Authority: Matthew 10:1

The authority of Jesus is demonstrated through his teaching, power to forgive sins, authority over nature, and even in the surprising response of demons.⁶⁵ It is in Matt. 10:1 that Jesus shares this authority with the disciples in fulfillment of his promise in

⁶⁴ Roth, “Missionary Ethics in Q 10:2-12,” 3.

⁶⁵ Case-Winters, *Matthew*, 131. Jesus’ authority as teacher is seen in Matthew 7:28-29, to forgive sins in 9:2-8, authority over nature in 8:27, and authority over demons in 8:29. The two demoniacs recognize Jesus’ authority and seek to negotiate with him, indicating an awareness of Jesus’ role in God’s final eschatological plan to overcome evil.

4:19 to make the disciples “fish for people.”⁶⁶ Jesus’ authorizing and sending of the twelve effectually reinforces his authority. Weaver explains:

Jesus' own actions constitute the direct response to the prayer which he has just instructed his disciples to pray, namely, that *God will act*. Accordingly, it is Jesus himself who implements the action of God described in 9:38, i.e., the sending out of laborers into the harvest. And this means that Jesus is acting not only with the authority of God but in the very place of God: Jesus' initiative in calling together his disciples and giving them authority is no less than an action of God himself.⁶⁷

In Matthew’s only use of the word *apostolos* (meaning “sent out one”),⁶⁸ the twelve disciples are summoned and given authority, demonstrating a graduation from followers/learners to those who carry the authority of Jesus.⁶⁹ Witherington points out that “the Twelve have a sort of derived authority, rather than innate or inherent authority.”⁷⁰ He further draws attention to the significance of Jesus choosing the twelve in that not only do they symbolize the twelve tribes of Israel, but these newly commissioned disciples play a role in judgment.⁷¹ It may be significant that “the twelve” are first mentioned in 10:1, at which point they are mentioned three times in rapid succession from 10:1-5.⁷²

⁶⁶ From fishing for people to harvesting crops, Jesus communicates the nature of his mission with metaphors that resonate with his audience. Both involve work and reward.

⁶⁷ Weaver, *Matthew’s Missionary Discourse*, 80.

⁶⁸ Witherington, *Matthew*, 215.

⁶⁹ J.L. Bailey, “Church as Embodiment of Jesus’ Mission (Matthew 9:36-10:39),” *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 30 (2003), 191.
file:///C:/Users/pasto/Downloads/Church_as_embodiment_of_Jesus.PDF.

⁷⁰ Witherington, *Matthew*, 215.

⁷¹ Witherington, *Matthew*, 217.

⁷² Grant R. Osborne and Clinton E. Arnold, *Matthew*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series, New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 371.

As was previously indicated, Matthew typically presents Jesus as healer rather than as exorcist. Nevertheless, Matthew states in 10:1 that the disciples have been given authority to cast out unclean spirits. The authority that Jesus shares with the disciples empowers them for deliverance ministry as well as for healing ministry. Matthew, unlike Mark and Luke, does not provide examples of the disciples performing healing or deliverance, although it may be assumed that they fulfill Jesus' commission.⁷³ Matthew is primarily focused on revealing Jesus as the uniquely anointed Christ,⁷⁴ and thus leaves the acts of the disciples to the imagination. While the immediate effects of Jesus' commissioning of the twelve are not readily apparent, Jesus has prepared them to continue his mission by authorizing them in 10:1, sending them out in 10:5, and instructing them for their itinerant ministry through the remainder of chapter 10.

Jesus went beyond the practice of his day in which disciples primarily memorized the teachings of their rabbi by including his disciples in ministry. Grant R. Osborne emphasizes that Jesus extends his own authority to the disciples "*at the very beginning of their training!*"⁷⁵ The disciples have done nothing noteworthy at this point. Authority is not given as a reward for achievement or in recognition of ability but to enable the disciples to carry on the mission of Jesus. The focus is not on ability but on availability.⁷⁶

For Matthew, harvest work is fundamentally God's business. As Chief Harvester, it is God who sends workers into the fields. The harvest is not contingent on human

⁷³ Paffenroth, "Jesus as Anointed and Healing Son of David in the Gospel of Matthew," 551.

⁷⁴ Paffenroth, "Jesus as Anointed and Healing Son of David in the Gospel of Matthew," 547.

⁷⁵ Osborne, *Matthew*, 362.

⁷⁶ Nita Kuehn, "Healing and Deliverance" (lecture by *Walking in Freedom Ministries*, Lubbock, TX, March 27, 2021).

initiative but on God taking the lead as the one who sends and shares authority. Beyond responding to Jesus' call to discipleship and presumably obeying Jesus' command to pray for harvest workers, the twelve have neither volunteered for nor taken initiative in this harvest work. At no point do we see the disciples raise their hands and ask to join the team. Instead, the disciples are "chosen, authorized, and sent by God through Christ."⁷⁷ The sending of the disciples demonstrates two truths in tension: One, mission is God's sovereign work; and two, God chooses to commission the twelve for a co-mission in which the disciples share in the work, responsibility, and authority of Christ.

The *exousia* given to the disciples in 10:1 can be translated as "authority" or "power."⁷⁸ For thematic and devotional purposes, Eugene Peterson's The Message Version (MSG) of 10:1 bears consideration: "The prayer was no sooner prayed than it was answered. Jesus called twelve of his followers and sent them into the ripe fields. He gave them power to kick out the evil spirits and to tenderly care for the bruised and hurt lives." This rendering of the text expresses the tone of Matt. 9:35-10:1, as it integrates bold authority (10:1) with tender compassion (9:36). This is the heart of the Good Shepherd and must represent the nature of work to be implemented by those whom Jesus has commissioned. This ferocity and tenderness represent the heart of God's mission in the world. It is not uncommon to find congregations and larger branches of the Church that excel in works of compassion and others that excel in power. The Gospel of Matthew invites us to see these two qualities working hand-in-hand.

⁷⁷ Boring, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 252.

⁷⁸ Brown, "Matthew," 99.

Vulnerability of Harvest Workers: The Second Mission Discourse

Although the remaining text of chapter 10 is technically outside the purview of this paper, Jesus' instructions offer important insight and thematic consistency with our primary text. Boring expounds on the interrelation between the work of Jesus and his disciples:

As the disciples function with the authority of Christ, the discourse begins by charging them to go to the same lost sheep of Israel as has Jesus to proclaim the same message, to perform the same healings, exorcisms, and even raisings of the dead, to live the same wandering, dependent life of poverty, and to anticipate the same mixed reception.⁷⁹

The second Mission Discourse could be described as “rules for the road”⁸⁰ in which Jesus instructs and prepares the newly commissioned itinerant ministers as to “where they will go, what they will do, and how they will deal with both reception and rejection.”⁸¹ Jesus prepares the disciples for a life in which they will share in the vulnerability of the sheep to whom they are sent.

The practice of ministry detailed by Jesus further calls for the vulnerability of abandoning worldly comforts and protections to rely on the hospitality of strangers.

Ulrich Luz explains Matthew's perspective on poverty and defenselessness:

Thus two things are important for Matthew: first, that the proclamation of the gospel is not to be a business, and then—taking up the Q tradition—that a person who has made arrangements in advance for food, is on the road in good shoes, strides along in normal clothing, and is armed with a staff against attacks cannot proclaim the kingdom of God. For Matthew, poverty and defenselessness belong to the proclamation of the gospel.⁸²

⁷⁹ Boring, “The Gospel of Matthew,” 256.

⁸⁰ Witherington, *Matthew*, 215.

⁸¹ Weaver, *Matthew's Missionary Discourse*, 84.

⁸² Luz, *Matthew 8-20*, 77.

It is said that St. Francis of Assisi was so moved by the command of Christ to forsake worldly comforts that he threw away his shoes after reading this passage.⁸³ Although this text has traditionally been interpreted as a denunciation of pride and greed,⁸⁴ it should be understood in light of the surrounding text, which focuses on the vulnerability of the sheep without a shepherd, as well as on the vulnerability of those sent out as sheep among wolves.⁸⁵ Those joining the harvest mission will remain in a vulnerable position of dependency for protection, provision, and authority.

J.L. Bailey explains, “The lifestyle of Jesus’ disciples must correspond to the content of the kingdom message, good news for those poor and vulnerable.”⁸⁶ In short, they must practice what they preach. By trusting God for their daily bread (and provision in general), the disciples enter the vulnerability of those to whom they are sent. Jesus’ ministry is not carried out by the “haves” condescending to the “have nots.” The Gospel is not preached from above the need but rather in the midst of it. That’s the incarnation.

Our society has an unhealthy view of mission, reinforcing a hierarchical structure that keeps people in their place. When bearers of the kingdom message minister with self-made affluence, they are perceived as the source of blessing rather than God. The Good News, in this case, becomes a well-meaning humanistic effort. Until the bearers of the Gospel live as witnesses to its healing and transforming nature, our communities may

⁸³ Warren Carter, “Matthew,” in *Fortress Commentary on the Bible*, the New Testament, ed. Margaret P Aymer, Cynthia Briggs Kittredge, and David A Sanchez (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 145.

⁸⁴ Carter, “Matthew,” 145.

⁸⁵ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14-28*, Word Biblical Commentary, Vol. 33b, ed. David Allan Hubbard, Glenn W Barker, and Ralph P Martin (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1995), 276. The preface of Matthew 10:16 with “behold” sharpens the impact of this statement.

⁸⁶ Bailey, “Church as Embodiment of Jesus’ Mission,” 192.

accept a gift here and there while passing on the Gospel we profess. The kingdom message comes alive when offered within the context of compassion and shared vulnerability.

Another expression of the concept of vulnerability is that of grace. Apostolic ministry (the ministry of “the sent”), according to Matt. 10:1-42, is fundamentally grace-based. Contrary to the typical depiction of apostles as movers and shakers who make things happen, they are itinerant sent ones living in a posture of humble receptivity. They are as poor and needy as others, yet they have found the Source of blessing. They walk in supernatural power, not due to their innate ability, but out of sheer dependence upon God's grace. God must supply everything from mundane provisions of food and shelter to miraculous works of healing and deliverance.

Conclusion

Well-meaning Christians are prone to assume that the mission of the Church can be completed by hard work, good intentions, and rehearsed evangelistic scripts. The mission of Jesus, as shared with the disciples and recounted by Matthew, is wholly dependent upon God's commissioning, authorizing, and sending of modern-day shepherd-harvesters. This means that the process for equipping disciples to enter the harvest field alongside Jesus must implement a methodology intentionally aligned with the ministry of Jesus. The method should take its cues from the second Mission Discourse in presenting principles and patterns of life by which laborers in the harvest are to operate. The text of Matt. 9:35-10:1 provides a vivid picture of what it means to engage in mission that is unapologetically supernatural.

Several essential considerations emerge from this study. First, compassion cultivates a holy atmosphere in which desperation and love converge, creating space for God to work. Christlike compassion has the power to purify motives and push us past our comfort zones to meet the needs of others. Genuine compassion flattens the hierarchical structure in which the “haves” condescend to help the “have nots” so that disciples instead engage their communities incarnationally. In keeping with the somewhat graphic description of compassion previously referenced as the “stirring of one’s bowels,” this internal stirring within the proverbial gut is evidence of the working and nudging of the Holy Spirit. This divine, soul-shaking experience of God’s compassion is an invitation to partner with God in mission.

Second, shepherd-harvesters participate in both the blessing and judgment of God. While we may feel a tension between the two, they reflect the mercy and justice of God. This may be prescriptive in calling grace-leaning traditions to remember that Jesus is the righteous judge and in calling truth-leaning traditions to demonstrate mercy. These values are, after all, two sides of the same coin.

Third, if Jesus’ metaphor of sheep without a shepherd invites us to share in God’s compassion, his metaphor of harvest asks us to share in his urgency. Authorized harvest-hands are needed to enter the fields, white with harvest. Congregations would do well to evaluate how many of their programs and ministries demonstrate a genuine urgency for the Lord’s harvest. Further, Christian disciples would be wise to pray for God to reveal the gravity and urgency of entering the fields. Even so, this work awaits the authorization of the Chief Harvester in response to our prayers. In this partnership, the dance between God’s sovereignty and humanity’s participation converges in a unique co-mission.

Fourth, Jesus' authority is demonstrated through miracles, and his disciples are called to share in this work. Those who desire to walk in Christ's spiritual authority must continually seek to be pruned and sanctified by God. This authority is paired with dependency and vulnerability, which characterize the lives of those who carry Jesus' authority in mission. Shepherd-harvesters are to demonstrate the same vulnerability of the sheep to whom they are sent.

In equipping disciples for ministry, it is crucial that they be motivated by the compassion of Christ and urgency to enter the harvest. Further, the mission of God will be fulfilled by the power of God, with humanity serving as willing vessels and eager partners in this work. From sharing in God's compassion to administering God's healing power, this work is wholly dependent upon the power and provision of God. May the Holy Spirit reveal the weightiness of this calling to the Church today, authorizing us with supernatural power to enter the Lord's harvest.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The enduring legacy of John Wesley, as demonstrated in the Wesleyan Revival and its many ripples, towers over the man's five-foot-six frame. Wesley has been known by many titles, including "father of modern evangelicalism"¹ and even the "spiritual and intellectual father of the modern holiness and Pentecostal movements."² Viewed by the public as "a rampant enthusiast, an autocratic leader, a spiritual giant, a confident preacher of *sola fide*," John Wesley was nevertheless an introspective individual for whom few labels suffice.³

John Wesley took the road less traveled; he did so literally as an itinerant field preacher and metaphorically as a controversial leader and reformer. Wesley had an insatiable curiosity, an openness to new concepts, and an inner drive to seek and share truth regardless of opposition from within and without. This made for an incomparable life and legacy.

¹ Philip Harrold, "Contextual Churches in History," in *Church for Every Context*, Michael Moynagh (London, UK: SCM, 2021), 45.

² Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Tradition: Charismatic Movements in the Twentieth Century*, 2nd ed, 3rd print ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2000), 1.

³ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists: Second Edition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 207.

Wesley was a man of strength and vigor, traveling five thousand miles a year as he established Methodist societies, preaching several times a day.⁴ This was perhaps due more to will and determination than to natural health, as he was spitting blood at age twenty-seven. From the age of thirty-six until his death at age eighty-seven, Wesley traveled over two hundred thousand miles and preached over forty thousand sermons.⁵

It was Wesley's intention to recover the heart and mission of the *primitive church*, which is affirmed by the epitaph on Wesley's tombstone, which reads: "This great light arose . . . to enlighten these nations, and to revive, enforce, and defend, the pure apostolic doctrines and practices of the primitive church: which he continued to do, both by his writings and his labours for more than half a century."⁶ The newly formed movement of British Methodism grew to 140,000 converts by the time of Wesley's death in 1791 and would continue its expansion across the globe after his passing.⁷

Wesley understood that revival could be most effectively spread and sustained through a connected discipleship structure.⁸ While Wesley learned about field preaching from George Whitfield, the consummate evangelist, it was John Wesley's apostolic gifting that enabled him to build enduring structures in addition to planting seeds. Wherever Wesley preached, Methodist societies emerged.

⁴ Daniel R. Jennings, *The Supernatural Occurrences of John Wesley* (Lexington, KY: Sean Multimedia, 2012), 2.

⁵ Ronald A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion, with Special Reference to the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 423.

⁶ Joe Lavino, "What we can learn from the words of John Wesley's tomb," Feb 27, 2017, <https://www.umc.org/en/content/what-we-can-learn-from-the-words-on-john-wesleys-tomb>.

⁷ George G. Hunter III, *The Recovery of a Contagious Methodist Movement* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011), 5.

⁸ G.M. Ditchfield and Grayson Ditchfield, *The Evangelical Revival* (London, UK: UCL Press, 1998), 63.

This new movement impacted people's lives beyond the common expectation that the primary function of the Church was for people to be "hatched, matched, and dispatched."⁹ The Church of England, much like the Western Church today, made the faulty assumption that their nation was Christian. The Methodist Movement, however, saw fields ripe for the harvest. George Hunter III writes, "What the Anglicans saw as a parish full of Christians, the Methodists saw as a mission field."¹⁰

Wesley's pragmatism allowed him to pursue possibilities that went against the grain of the predominant culture and even against his personal preference and sensibilities. As a man of the Enlightenment, Wesley was fascinated with scientific discoveries. And yet, ever the paradox, Wesley was also open to God's supernatural work within the Church.¹¹ There may have been no greater figure than the endlessly inquisitive Wesley to bridge the gap between the Enlightenment and the Evangelical Revival. The revival spoke to elements of the belief system which were dismissed by the intelligentsia and yet still held by the common folks. Henry D. Rack describes Wesley as a "cultural mediator" between Christianity and the Enlightenment.¹² Rack contends that Wesley's belief in an invisible, spiritual reality explains the "peculiar appeal" of Methodism in the eighteenth century.¹³

⁹ Hunter III, *The Recovery of a Contagious Methodist Movement*, 6.

¹⁰ Hunter III, *The Recovery of a Contagious Methodist Movement*, 17.

¹¹ Robert Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous: John Wesley's Idea of the Supernatural and the Identification of Methodists in the Eighteenth Century* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2013), 167.

¹² Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd ed. (London, UK: Epworth Press, 2003), 435.

¹³ Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast*, 432.

The experience of the supernatural within Methodism defied the odds by emerging within a culture in which cessationism rejected the possibility of post-biblical miracles and in which naturalism rejected miracles altogether.¹⁴ Heitzenrater notes, “In an age when most of the population was suspicious of religious fanaticism, Wesley was not hesitant to accept radical manifestations of the work of the Holy Spirit, but he also was cautious enough to measure such experiences by biblical norms to test their authenticity.”¹⁵ Wesley took an even-handed approach in discerning whether manifestations were a genuine work of the Spirit, holding them lightly and trusting that the truth would be revealed.¹⁶

Due to the inherent bias of historical writing, such aspects of John Wesley’s belief system and practice of ministry require some digging. This is not meant to cast aspersions upon historians but to acknowledge that historians must choose the scope of their study, especially when dealing with a life and theology as rich and nuanced as Wesley’s. Nonetheless, the work of the Spirit has all too often been glossed over. In some cases, the history of the Spirit’s activity within the Methodist movement has been sanitized and

¹⁴ Peter Bellini, “Wesley, the Almost Charismatic: Was Wesley a Charismatic Christian?”, 6. https://www.academia.edu/43289267/ARTICLE_WESLEY_THE_ALMOST_CHARISMATIC_larger_draft.

¹⁵ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 289-90.

¹⁶ Robert Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous*, 30. Wesley’s encounter with the French Prophets in January 1739 did not sit well with him. By the summer of that same year, Wesley concluded that they were a “source of confusion and distraction” due to their negative impact on a Christian of Wesley’s acquaintance. However, his *first response*, as recorded in his journal on January 28, 1739, was that he would “let the matter alone; knowing this, that ‘if it be not of God, it will come to nought.’” It seems that Wesley sought to refrain from knee-jerk reactions and snap judgments, instead choosing to watch and wait.

despiritualized altogether.¹⁷ Robert Webster speaks to the treatment of Wesley's supernatural belief system:

Overlooking this facet of Wesley's life, modern scholarship has often concluded that Wesley's vision was anachronistic in an age dominated by mechanical science, industrial progress, and philosophical scepticism. This superficial reading of John Wesley's life and thought, however, does little justice to a figure of intellectual history and fails to recognize the nuances of a philosophical development that endeavored to find a place for metaphysics against tremendous odds.¹⁸

Wesley saw a direct correlation between one's views regarding the supernatural and Scripture. For example, he believed that skepticism regarding witchcraft indicated a skepticism towards the Bible. He reasoned that "giving up [the belief in the reality of] witchcraft is in effect giving up the bible" and that if even one instance of the interaction between "men with separate spirits be admitted, their whole castle in the air (deism, atheism, materialism) falls to the ground."¹⁹ In an interesting turn of logic, Wesley argued that the burden of proof against the supernatural realm fell to those who denied it.²⁰

This chapter will survey the role of the supernatural in the life of John Wesley and early Methodism, drawing on historical occurrences that are often overlooked or ignored. To borrow from the title of Frank Billman's book on the subject,²¹ a supernatural thread can be traced throughout Methodism, from key tenets of Wesleyan theology through dynamic manifestations of the Holy Spirit within Methodist services and small groups.

¹⁷ Frank H. Billman, *The Supernatural Thread in Methodism: Signs and Wonders Among Methodists Then and Now*, Rev. ed. (Monee, IL: Amazon Publishing, 2021), 42.

¹⁸ Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous*, 72.

¹⁹ Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous*, 77, quoting May 27, 1768, *BEW* 22:135.

²⁰ Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous*, 77.

²¹ Billman, *The Supernatural Thread in Methodism*, 22.

As the fuller story of Methodism is brought to light, we may once again claim our spiritual heritage and intentionally live out the supernatural DNA of the Methodist movement. This study will begin with the more subtle aspects of supernatural belief and practice in our tradition and then move to more overt examples.

Historical Narrative

The Supernatural Starts Small

The supernatural beliefs of United Methodists are often hidden in plain sight; they simply need to be named. Frank Billman contends that “any work of the Holy Spirit that causes a notable change in something could be considered a manifestation of the Spirit.”²² This would include the Holy Spirit’s work in salvation and sanctification, as well as in healing and deliverance. The Christian faith is intrinsically supernatural, from God’s bestowal of prevenient grace through the moment a believer steps into eternity. And yet, it is rare for the supernatural dimension of our faith to be recognized within United Methodism.

The sacramental theology of our tradition should prepare us to appreciate supernatural ministry, for we believe that the bread and chalice not only remind us of Jesus’s gift of salvation through his work on the cross but that they contain and convey the very grace and presence of Jesus. Our understanding of the sacraments goes beyond obedience and remembrance by immersing us in God’s salvific work. Our stomachs are not simply filled with bread and juice; our hearts are filled with life and peace. Our heads

²² Billman, *The Supernatural Thread in Methodism*, 14.

are not merely dampened with water; our souls are washed clean. Sacraments are an outward sign of an inward, spiritual grace,²³ much as supernatural signs and wonders are an outward sign of an inward grace.

Our understanding of grace is supernatural. However, the supernatural nature of grace is often overlooked due to the tendency to soften and dismiss the effect of sin upon humanity. Wesley embraced the doctrine of Original Sin and believed that it was only by grace that the image of God could be restored within us.²⁴ When the implications of sin are minimized, grace becomes more of a gentle affirmation of the good within humanity than a dramatic deliverance from sin and restoration of God's image. When grace is primarily perceived as an extra sprinkling of favor upon something that is already whole, the transformative element of grace is minimized. In such cases, religion becomes an expression of moral therapeutic deism²⁵ in which God wants people to be nice, to be happy, to go to heaven when they die, and to manage life on their own with little to no divine intervention.²⁶

William Willimon voices what is at stake if Methodism ceases to speak to spiritual realities of our faith, and although he does not directly address the supernatural, his comments are cogent to our topic. Willimon writes, "When Methodism fails to stress

²³ Rob L. Staples, *Outward Sign and Inward Grace: The Place of Sacraments in Wesleyan Spirituality* (Kansas City, KS: Beacon Hill Press, 1991).

²⁴ Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous*, 59.

²⁵ This phrase was first coined by Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton in *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005).

²⁶ Leroy Huizenga, "What is Moral Therapeutic Deism and Why Does it Fail?," *St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology*, accessed May 26, 2021, <https://stpaulcenter.com/what-is-moral-therapeutic-deism-and-why-does-it-fail/>.

Wesley's conviction of the powerful, even prevenient, grace of God as the source of all possibility of new life, Methodism degenerates into insufferable, sentimental moralism in which the Christian life is depicted as simply another helpful means of making nice people even nicer."²⁷

For Wesley, however, grace is not merely a sign of affirmation or a measure of comfort, for it brings change that is only possible with God. Theological perspectives that gloss over the impact of sin on humanity and the need for salvation will not be fully able to appreciate the supernatural element of grace. Wesley believed that conviction of sin was a necessary step in the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation), as prevenient grace takes on the role of convincing (or convicting) grace.²⁸ Interestingly, Wesley believed that those who experienced extreme reactions or manifestations in his meetings were envisioning the great chasm between human sinfulness and God's holiness.²⁹

A point of confusion in Methodist congregations today relates to salvation and new birth.³⁰ Some years ago, a lifelong Methodist expressed discomfort with the term "born again" and implied that Methodists don't need to have this experience. Regrettably, the term is so often used by Baptists that Methodists may not realize that this concept belongs to all of Christianity and not to any one denomination or tradition. Because this biblical description of salvation is unfamiliar and even offensive to some, it is rejected.

²⁷ William H. Willimon, "Conclusion: Suddenly A Light from Heaven," in *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*, Kenneth J. Collins and John H. Tyson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 250.

²⁸ Kenneth J. Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation: The Heart of John Wesley's Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997), 48.

²⁹ Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous*, 117.

³⁰ In John 3:3, Jesus said, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above" NRSV. Thus, some Christian traditions refer to salvation as being "born again."

Regardless of whether one uses the term “born again,” we must experience a spiritual rebirth. United Methodists must rediscover the meaning of sin, grace, and salvation within our Wesleyan heritage.

The grace of God is more than a warm and fuzzy concept, and supernatural experiences are more than goosebumps. The work of God within us is meant to convey God’s provision, which brings transformation and new life. Though the word is rarely used, our theology is supernatural in nature. God’s grace is above and beyond our natural experience, providing forgiveness and healing that would not otherwise be possible.

Another supernatural belief hidden in plain sight is our belief in the Holy Spirit. Though often unnoticed, our belief in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit is woven throughout one of our most influential theological books, the *United Methodist Hymnal*. Even beyond the theologically rich hymns of Charles Wesley, our baptismal liturgy conveys the belief that the gift of the Holy Spirit is bestowed at baptism. According to this liturgy, the pastor is to place their hands on the newly baptized person’s head and invoke the work of the Holy Spirit as follows, “The Holy Spirit work within you, that being born through water and the Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Jesus Christ.”³¹ In this reference to Jesus’ words in John 3:5, we see the dual nature of Christian baptism through water and the Spirit. And yet, many faithful United Methodist members never got the memo that they have been born of the Spirit.

³¹ *United Methodist Hymnal*, “Baptismal Covenant II” (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 39-43. John 3:5 is referenced, which reads, “Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.’” Similarly, John the Baptist states in Matthew 3:11 that the one to come after him (Jesus) will “baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.”

An “Extraordinary” Boundary Breaker

The “sacramental Evangelicalism” of the Methodist movement continues to stretch and challenge us today.³² Wesley’s straddling of the sacramental and evangelical worlds is seen in his support of both “ordinary” ministers who administer the sacraments and “extraordinary” lay preachers who focused on repentance and conversion.³³ In a world of either/or, Wesley chose both/and.

Wesley’s claim of an extraordinary calling seemed to give him permission to implement new practices and open the door to the work of the Holy Spirit. While we often struggle to bring together sacramental and evangelical theology today, perhaps the common thread between the two is the work of the Spirit. Sadly, clergy and laity alike who find themselves on either end of the sacramental/evangelical spectrum can practice their religion with little to no involvement of the Spirit. Sacramental theology can be reduced to ritualism, and evangelical theology can be reduced to legalism. Wesley, however, saw both sacramental and evangelical experience as works of the Spirit. By seeking a greater understanding of the supernatural thread of Methodism, the sacramental and evangelical branches have the potential to converge once again.

Returning to the concept of ordinary and extraordinary ministry, Kenneth Collins explains, “One senses that in the proper nature of things, the sacraments and the ‘ordinary’ ministries of the Church should suffice, but the Methodists had been called by

³² Kenneth J. Collins and John H. Tyson, *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 248. The term “sacramental Evangelicalism” was coined by Ted. A. Campbell.

³³ Collins, *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 171.

God to address the specific situation of Wesley's time and place,"³⁴ which includes the "extraordinary" apostolic call of the Wesleyan movement.

The terms ordinary and extraordinary are given multiple applications within Wesley's life and theology, conveying permission to push the envelope and break out of the status quo of his day. Wesley saw his ordination by the bishop as his ordinary call to preach God's Word and his extraordinary call in the "works God doth by my ministry, which prove that he is with me of a truth in the exercise of my office."³⁵ In this extraordinary call, Wesley took the liberty of implementing innovative evangelistic endeavors, from claiming the world as his parish to preaching from his father's tomb when he was barred from the pulpit at Epworth.³⁶ Wesley reflected, in his characteristic results-oriented way, that he accomplished more by preaching three days on his father's tomb than by preaching in his pulpit for three years.³⁷ While the boundary-breaking nature of early Methodism was viewed as seditious by the religious establishment,³⁸ Wesley believed that the Methodist movement remained faithful to the doctrines of the Church of England.³⁹

³⁴ Collins, *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 171.

³⁵ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Letters*, Bicentennial ed., vol. 25, ed. Albert C. Outler, Frank Baker, Richard P. Heitzenrater, and Randy L. Maddox (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1980), 660.

³⁶ Kenneth J. Collins, *A Real Christian: The Life of John Wesley* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 72.

³⁷ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Journals and Diaries II*, Bicentennial ed., vol. 19, ed. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 19:96.

³⁸ Philip Harrold, "Contextual Churches in History," 43.

³⁹ Collins, *A Real Christian*, 73.

Conjunctive Theology

Wesleyan theology holds seemingly disparate concepts in tension. This delicate balance embraces nuance in diverse beliefs. Collins writes, “We seem not to know how to speak of the movement that God wrought through the Wesleys except through conjunctions.”⁴⁰ However, modern Wesleyan scholarship is not quite so balanced and refined, as Wesley’s interpreters often convey conflicting messages and implications of his writings. Donald Dayton concludes that John Wesley “blended themes that appear to be inconsistent into a fragile *gestalt* that seems at one time to provide the evidence of his genius and at another to be held together by little more than the sheer force of his personality and convictions.”⁴¹

The intricately woven theological tapestry that Wesley designed was both beautiful and incredibly fragile, making the movement vulnerable after the death of the practical theologian who created it. Those carrying the movement forward held to certain themes while leaving others behind.⁴² Today, it is not uncommon to hear Methodists from various regions and theological or political perspectives speak in such diverse and conflicting manners as to make one wonder whether they are from different Christian denominations entirely.

Wesley’s theology and practice of ministry dances through our carefully constructed theological divisions, leaving us either to rebuild the divisions or to reconsider how God’s revelation through various traditions may actually fit together. The

⁴⁰ Collins, *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*, 248.

⁴¹ Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 38.

⁴² Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, 39.

conjunctive theology of Wesley is not hodge-podge in nature but is thoughtfully constructed. Collins writes:

The sophisticated theological synthesis that Wesley painstakingly crafted throughout his career held together, without contradiction, law and gospel, faith and holy living, grace and works, grace as both favor and empowerment, justification and sanctification, instantaneousness and process, the universality of grace (prevenient) and its limited (saving) actualization, divine initiative and human response, as well as initial and final justification. Wesley's theology then was, in reality, a "conjunctive" theology.⁴³

Witness of the Spirit

One of the greatest treasures of the Wesleyan theological tradition is the expectation that believers experience assurance of justification through the witness of the Holy Spirit. The biblical foundation for the doctrine of assurance comes from Romans 8:16, in which "it is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (Rom. 8:16, NRSV). Wesley writes of this experience, "The testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly 'witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God'; that Jesus Christ hath loved me, and given himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God."⁴⁴

Wesley's mission to the colony of Georgia, which began February 6, 1736, provided a crucial season of soul-searching and further development of his theology through his relationship with two groups of German Pietists, the Salzburgers and the Moravians, the latter of which followed the teachings of August Spangenberg and Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf. Spangenberg's question to Wesley, "Does the Spirit of

⁴³ Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 207.

⁴⁴ John Wesley, "Witness of the Spirit I," *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 149.

God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?” had lasting repercussions on Wesley’s faith and the trajectory of Methodism.⁴⁵

In his ongoing search for full assurance of faith, Wesley recognized the central role of the Holy Spirit, both through the direct, inner witness of the Spirit and the indirect, external witness of the fruit of the Spirit.⁴⁶ This two-prong doctrine of assurance was meant to avoid the extremes of enthusiasm and legalism. The indirect witness of the fruit of the Spirit helps believers avoid enthusiasm and fanaticism, while the direct witness of the Spirit helps believers avoid the formalism and legalism of self-justification.⁴⁷ In keeping with Wesleyan sacramental language, we could say that the external fruit of the Spirit is an outward sign of an inward grace.

If United Methodists are to be true to our doctrine, then we will depend upon the Holy Spirit to provide the supernatural witness that we have become children of God and that we are living as children of God. The witness of the Spirit moves us into more overtly supernatural territory, for it is dependent not upon mental assent but upon spiritual experience. Due to the temptation to base our sense of assurance on our good works or feelings, it is important to hold together Wesley’s balanced understanding of assurance. Further, as we may be tempted to manufacture fruit through humanistic efforts rather than the indwelling, transformative work of the Spirit, it is essential that the outer witness of fruit be partnered with the inner witness of the Spirit.

⁴⁵ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 62.

⁴⁶ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 88.

⁴⁷ Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 135-6.

A little-discussed aspect of this theological perspective is that the witness of the Spirit can be experienced both at justification (assurance that sins have been forgiven) and at sanctification (assurance that sins have been removed).⁴⁸ The Holy Spirit is active in the work of justification and sanctification, as well as in providing assurance that these experiences have taken place. The Holy Spirit brings transformation and confirms that this transformation has occurred throughout one's life.

Assurance at Aldersgate

One of the most familiar stories of John Wesley's life for United Methodists is his dramatic encounter at Aldersgate, during which he finally experienced assurance of his salvation:

In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.⁴⁹

Wesley celebrated his heart-warming experience and the new assurance that he was indeed a Christian, and yet he also watched for this experience to be fully authenticated by fruits of faith and assurance. While Wesley enjoyed peace resulting from his experience, he was disturbed by the fact that he did not also experience joy as a lasting fruit of his Aldersgate experience.⁵⁰ Thankfully, Wesley attended an all-night

⁴⁸ Collins, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, 183.

⁴⁹ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 79.

⁵⁰ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 79.

prayer meeting seven months later at Fetter Lane, which at last provided a more enduring sense of assurance.

Fetter Lane, the Methodist Pentecost

When the General Conference of the Methodist Church of England gathered in 1837, a committee was called to prepare a Centennial celebration of Methodism. In selecting the date for the official beginning of Methodism, they could have chosen Wesley's heartwarming Aldersgate experience on May 24, 1738, but they instead chose January 1, 1739 to represent the official birth of Methodism.⁵¹

On New Year's Eve, John Wesley gathered with his brother Charles Wesley, George Whitefield, and about sixty others for a Watchnight meeting at Fetter Lane.

Wesley recounts:

About three in the morning, as we were continuing constant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, in so much that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground. As soon as we were recovered a little from that awe and amazement at the presence of his Majesty, we broke out with one voice, "We praise thee, O God; we acknowledge thee to be the Lord."⁵²

This was the beginning of Methodism. Whitefield would refer to the experience as "a Pentecostal season" in which they were "filled as with new wine . . . overwhelmed with the Divine Presence."⁵³ One may rightly ask why so few faithful Methodists have heard about Fetter Lane. Frank Billman provides a challenging answer:

It is "safer" for us to look back at Wesley's Aldersgate experience as the beginning of Methodism. It was a private experience. It was a salvation

⁵¹ Billman, *The Supernatural Thread in Methodism*, 42-3.

⁵² Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley: Journals and Diaries II*, 1 January, 1739, 29.

⁵³ Charles P. Schmitt, *Floods Upon the Dry Ground* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image, 1998), 128.

experience or at least an assurance of salvation experience. Even non-Methodists have no problem with someone having a “heartwarming experience.” But the Methodists at the one hundred year mark were still greatly in touch with the fact that Methodism began with a “messy” outpouring of the Holy Spirit where over sixty Anglicans were all over the floor crying out due to the tangible presence of God in the room with them. Methodism began with a baptism of the Holy Spirit experience that a group of people shared together like on the day of Pentecost.⁵⁴

Douglas J. Fox sets out to prove that it was Wesley’s Fetter Lane experience, more so than the Aldersgate event, which flipped the switch in activating signs and wonders within the Methodist movement, as well as providing lasting transformation within the life of John Wesley.⁵⁵ In comparing the seven months following Aldersgate with the seven months following the Fetter Lane gathering, Fox discovered that Wesley continued to experience fear, heaviness, and a lack of joy even after his Aldersgate experience.⁵⁶ Whereas, although Wesley experienced a single resurgence of spiritual angst three days after Fetter Lane, he does not record any such experience after that point. Wesley, at long last, experienced confidence and assurance.⁵⁷

Further, Fox identifies only two supernatural experiences recorded by John Wesley in the seven months after Aldersgate, neither of which demonstrate spiritual victory or breakthrough, compared with at least thirty-one supernatural occurrences in the seven months following his Fetter Lane experience.⁵⁸ The significant contribution of

⁵⁴ Billman, *The Supernatural Thread in Methodism*, 42-3.

⁵⁵ Douglas J. Fox, “‘Word and Power’: Increasing Supernatural Ministry Through a Modification of ‘Disciple: Becoming Disciples Through Bible Study’” (DMin diss., United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, 2020), 78. Fox’s dissertation compares the supernatural occurrences recorded in John Wesley’s journal during the seven months after his Aldersgate experience on May 24, 1738, along with the seven months after his Fetter Lane experience on January 1, 1739.

⁵⁶ Fox, “Word and Power,” 91.

⁵⁷ Fox, “Word and Power,” 99-100.

⁵⁸ Fox, “Word and Power,” 101.

Wesley's Aldersgate experience to the rich theological perspective of Methodism is undeniable. However, it was Fetter Lane that served as the bonfire of God's Spirit in igniting a spiritual wildfire that would spread across the globe.⁵⁹

Wesley's Views on the Supernatural

Wesley seemed to follow the breadcrumbs of the Holy Spirit, putting his preconceived notions on the back burner as he looked for evidence of God's approval through the blessing of his Spirit. Heitzenrater writes:

[Wesley] also observed God's actions in the lives of other persons as important means of understanding God's will and providence. In some ways, his understanding of the gospel was confirmed as much or more in the lives of others as it was in his own. In an age when most of the population was suspicious of religious fanaticism, Wesley was not hesitant to accept radical manifestations of the work of the Holy Spirit, but he also was cautious enough to measure such experiences by biblical norms to test their authenticity.⁶⁰

Wesley contended for the validity of the supernatural against the critique of Reformed cessationism, declaring, "I do not recollect any Scripture wherein we are taught that miracles were to be confined within the limits either of the apostolic age . . . or any period of time, longer or shorter, even till the restitution of all things."⁶¹ Further,

⁵⁹ Fox describes five supernatural occurrences during the period between Aldersgate and Fetter Lane, only two of which seem to be overtly supernatural. The other three include Wesley's relief from temptation, a condemned man's experience of peace when facing death, and a woman experiencing assurance of her salvation, 93-4. The two more clearly supernatural events are a traumatic dream which provided no help or relief and a possessed woman for whom there is no indication that deliverance occurred, 94-5.

⁶⁰ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 289-90.

⁶¹ John Wesley, *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, "Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained," ed. Thomas Jackson (London, UK: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1865), 465.

Wesley believed that every answer to prayer is a miracle and that if one is to believe the testimony of Scripture they must believe that God hears and answers prayer.⁶²

Wesley writes in his journal: “The grand reason why the miraculous gifts were so soon withdrawn, was not only that faith and holiness were well nigh lost; but that dry, formal, orthodox men began even then to ridicule whatever gifts they had not themselves, and to decry them all as either madness or imposture.”⁶³ This brings to mind the warnings found in Eph. 4:30 against grieving the Holy Spirit and in 1 Thess. 5:19 against quenching the Spirit. Although Wesley sometimes questioned the spiritual source of events, he took care to avoid dismissing or demeaning the work of the Spirit.

John Wesley and the Wesleyan movement were characteristically open to supernatural experiences. Lester Ruth explains that the supernatural was sought and desired within early Methodism:

The supernatural realm and the possibility of having an ecstatic experience within it were not on the periphery of their piety. These things occupied the center of their spirituality until well into the nineteenth century. Methodists expected and desired encounters with God and other spiritual beings through visions, dreams, miracles, signs and wonders. This supernatural quality saturated even their regular religious life in times of prayer and worship as Methodists shouted, fell, and danced in overwhelming experiences of God's wrath, grace, and presence.⁶⁴

Enthusiasm

The culture of early Methodism was threatening to both Church and State, as the movement not only infringed upon the territorial nature of established churches but also

⁶² Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 6, 322.

⁶³ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 2, 204.

⁶⁴ Lester Ruth, *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality: A Reader* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2005), 161.

as field preaching encouraged the gathering of the “rabble.”⁶⁵ David Hempton summarizes the thoughts of Ronald Knox, who devoted much of his work to the study of religious enthusiasm, on the person of John Wesley: “Wesley perplexed and intrigued Knox. Here was an Oxford-trained logician of cold and mechanical disposition who flirted with the raw edges of religious enthusiasm all his life.”⁶⁶

And yet the enthusiasm of the early Methodists balanced emotional engagement with reason, which was grounded by both the authority of Scripture and the Holy Spirit.⁶⁷ In fact, Methodists were known as “reasonable enthusiasts.”⁶⁸ While it was primarily Wesley himself who held together the subtle nuances of the movement, another paradox of early Methodism is that it was an enthusiast movement born into the age of the Enlightenment.⁶⁹

Field Preaching

The spirit of field preaching confirms the necessity of vulnerability for those who would become laborers in the Lord’s harvest, a topic discussed in the previous chapter. This is expressed well by Michael A. Beck and Jorge Acevedo: “The fields are a metaphor for the places where the people are, where they gather and share life. The field

⁶⁵ David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 33.

⁶⁶ Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, 34.

⁶⁷ Winfield Bevins, *Marks of a Movement: What the Church Today Can Learn from the Wesleyan Revival*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2019), 83.

⁶⁸ Bevins, *Marks of a Movement*, 81, referring to the book by Henry D. Rack. *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, 3rd ed. (London: Epworth Press: 2014).

⁶⁹ Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, 54.

represents vulnerability and the humility to enter the unknown—to go empty handed into a space where we don’t have all the answers.”⁷⁰ The Methodist movement was marked by vulnerability, as Wesley left the comfort and safety of familiar customs to reach his mission field. The missional impulse of the Holy Spirit was stronger than the strictures of Wesley’s culture and tradition, and in trading propriety for vulnerability, a new door opened for the Spirit to move.

Wesley writes, “I could scarcely reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which [Whitfield] set me an example on Sunday; I had been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church.”⁷¹ Within a matter of days, Wesley took the plunge into this new method of proclamation and evangelism: “I submitted to be more vile and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation.”⁷² In the same journal entry, Wesley details the focus of his message that day, in which he spoke to about three thousand people:

The Scripture on which I spoke was this (is it possible anyone should be ignorant that it is fulfilled in every true minister of Christ?): “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”⁷³

⁷⁰ Michael A. Beck with Jorge Acevedo, *A Field Guide to Methodist Fresh Expression* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2020), xvi.

⁷¹ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 2, 28 March, 1739.

⁷² Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 2 April, 1739.

⁷³ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 2 April, 1739. Isa. 61:1, 2; Luke 4:18, 19.

This passage, which is referenced in the United Methodist Communion ritual, *The Great Thanksgiving*, is one of the most power-packed passages of Scripture. It reflects the heart of God for broken people and calls for bondage-breaking evangelism and mission. The passage makes clear that it is the Spirit who makes these ministries of proclamation, evangelism, healing, and deliverance possible.

Thomas A. Langford points out that Wesley did not seek to evangelize the upper class; in fact, “Wesley did not establish a single Methodist preaching post in any of the five most privileged boroughs of London.”⁷⁴ Wesley sought to help the poor, the imprisoned, and the enslaved. He offered educational opportunities and desired to bring relief to those in need.⁷⁵ His desire to ensure that the poor hear the Gospel led him to fields ripe for harvest. Leigh Eric Schmidt writes of the hungry souls who met preachers in the fields, “The distance between this world and the next narrowed in the ears of the devout. Heaven was so close that on a good day they could hear it.”⁷⁶

The “open-air sermons, lay preachers, and institution of a church within the Church” of early Methodism could be compared with the Mendicant revival of the twelfth century, and John Wesley with St. Francis of Assisi.⁷⁷ In fact, Nathaniel Hone’s painting of John Wesley preaching in the open air is reminiscent of St. Francis.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Thomas A. Langford, *Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press: 1983), 16.

⁷⁵ Langford, *Practical Divinity*, 15-6.

⁷⁶ Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 65.

⁷⁷ Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion*, 426.

⁷⁸ G.M. Ditchfield, *The Evangelical Revival*, 63.



Figure 3. Portrait of John Wesley by Nathaniel Hone⁷⁹

Field preaching demonstrated a flexible and adaptive spirit that took lemons and made lemonade. When traditional avenues of preaching were closed to Wesley, he went to the field. When people groups were not effectively being reached, he went to the field.

The United Methodist Church has forgotten its missional DNA, preferring the safety of our sanctuaries to the modern-day fields surrounding us. Like Wesley, we may feel most at home surrounded by sacred symbols. Yet if we want to have the missional impact of early Methodism, we must once again lean outward into the world that surrounds us through innovative and immersive evangelism. In doing so, we may expect the Holy Spirit to meet us there.

⁷⁹ Nathaniel Hone, *Portrait of John Wesley*, 1766, oil on canvas, National Portrait Gallery, London, accessed May 25, 2021, London, <https://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw06699/John-Wesley>.

Spiritual Gifts

Although Wesley's primary focus was on Christ, he recognized the importance of the Holy Spirit in making Jesus experientially real.⁸⁰ While Wesley focused primarily on the fruit of the Spirit, he also supported the gifts of the Spirit.⁸¹ Using the previously discussed characterization of the ordinary and extraordinary, he categorized gifts as "ordinary gifts" and "extraordinary gifts," with healing, prophecy, discernment of spirits, and speaking in tongues falling into the latter category.⁸² Wesley believed that extraordinary gifts had fallen out of use due to the love of Christians waxing cold until only a dead form of religion remained.⁸³ While Wesley did not overtly encourage the use of the gifts of the Spirit, neither did he discourage them. When gifts or manifestations of the Spirit were experienced in Methodist meetings, Wesley watched them to discern whether they bore fruit.⁸⁴ Though demonstrating the cautious skepticism of the Enlightenment, Wesley was also careful to avoid disparaging that which could be a move of God. If events were discerned to be spiritually valid, he defended them. Albert Outler writes:

Wesley had a remarkably practical rule for judging *extraordinary* gifts of the Spirit (ecstasies, miracles, etc.). . . . No profession of an "extraordinary gift" ("tongues" or whatever) is to be rejected out of hand, as if we knew what the Spirit should or should not do. . . . What he did insist on was that such gifts are

⁸⁰ Howard A. Snyder with Daniel Runyon, *The Divided Flame: Wesleyans & the Charismatic Renewal* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1986), 57.

⁸¹ Snyder, *The Divided Flame*, 57.

⁸² Snyder, *The Divided Flame*, 58.

⁸³ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 7, *Sermon 89: The More Excellent Way*, 26-27.

⁸⁴ Snyder, *The Divided Flame*, 59.

never ends in themselves, that all of them must always be normed (and judged) by the Spirit's "ordinary" gifts ("love, joy, peace, patience, kindness . . .").⁸⁵

Wesley's response to those who took offense at more dramatic experiences and gifts was that the fruit of these powerful proofs of God's presence was peace and joy. The proof was in the pudding, and Wesley, ever the pragmatist, consistently looked for spiritual fruit as his primary defense against attacks on the Methodist movement.

Howard A. Snyder asserts that "even though the gifts of the Spirit played a relatively minor part in Wesley's theological understanding, their exercise played a major role in the growth of Methodism itself."⁸⁶ Early Methodism nurtured spiritual growth and practical ministry in such a way that gifts naturally sprung up among its leaders.⁸⁷

According to David Hempton:

Wherever Methodism took root in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there are stories of special providences and unusual events. Methodists believed that God was with them, not in a general theological sense, but in a set of encounters, which supposedly obeyed no other explanation than that of a proactive divine presence.⁸⁸

Manifestations of the Spirit

Those attending Wesley's outdoor preaching began to demonstrate spiritual phenomena, or manifestations of the Spirit, in which people would collapse, cry out, and quake. Wesley determined that though he had "seen many hysterical and many epileptic

⁸⁵ Albert C. Outler, "John Wesley as Theologian—Then and Now," *Methodist History* 12:4 (July 1974), 79.

⁸⁶ Snyder, *The Divided Flame*, 66.

⁸⁷ Snyder, *The Divided Flame*, 66.

⁸⁸ Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, 40.

fits . . . none of them were like this.”⁸⁹ In an intriguing interaction between John and his brother, Samuel Jr., the elder brother asked John whether these “agitations ever begin during the use of any collects of the Church . . . or during the preaching of any sermon that had before been preached within consecrated walls.”⁹⁰ John Wesley responded in true mic drop fashion with a sentiment we would do well to remember today:

How is it that you can’t praise God for saving so many souls from death, and covering such a multitude of sins, unless he will begin this work within consecrated walls? . . . But I rejoice to find that God is everywhere. I love the rites and ceremonies of the church. But I see, well-pleased, that our great Lord can work without them.⁹¹

Wesley was a collector of stories, and his interest in supernatural occurrences was evident in that he recorded observations of supernatural phenomena in his journals, correspondence, manuscripts, and in the *Arminian Magazine*.⁹² Supernatural manifestations were featured in each month’s edition of the *Arminian Magazine* under the title “The Providence of God Asserted” or “The Grace of God Manifested.”⁹³ The continued inclusion of such stories indicates that Wesley’s interest in the supernatural was a life-long fascination, not a passing fad.⁹⁴ These manifestations were present throughout Wesley’s ministry; in fact, he recorded one such experience in 1784, forty-five years after Fetter Lane: “When I began to pray, the flame broke out – many cried

⁸⁹ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Ward, 70.

⁹⁰ Collins, *A Real Christian*, 72.

⁹¹ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Baker, 694-5.

⁹² Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous*, 71. Wesley edited and wrote for the magazine for fourteen years, from 1778-1791.

⁹³ Billman, *The Supernatural Thread in Methodism*, 46.

⁹⁴ Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous*, 106.

aloud, many sank to the ground, many trembled exceedingly. But all seemed to be quite athirst for God, and penetrated by the presence of his power.”⁹⁵ While these experiences were recorded less often in Wesley’s later years, Billman suggests this may be due to the supernatural becoming a normative aspect of ministry so that it was no longer especially noteworthy.⁹⁶

Wesley’s approach to manifestations of the Spirit was characteristically measured. He believed that such activity could be genuine, a mixture of spiritual inspiration and unspiritual inclinations, or even a work of the devil.⁹⁷ The possibility of counterfeit expressions, however, did not deter Wesley from valuing genuine signs of the Holy Spirit’s work. Wesley writes that “this should not make us either deny or undervalue the real work of the Spirit. The shadow is no disparagement of the substance, nor the counterfeit of the real diamond.”⁹⁸

A surprising account of Wesley’s practice of ministry comes from one of his associates, John Cennick, who wrote that “when none were agitated in the meetings, Wesley prayed, ‘Lord! Where are thy tokens and signs?’ And I don’t remember ever to have seen it otherwise that on his so praying several were seized and screamed out.”⁹⁹ It seems that Wesley came to expect such manifestations as giving evidence of the work of the Spirit. Perhaps he discerned that manifestations of the Spirit were commonplace in

⁹⁵ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 1, 288.

⁹⁶ Billman, *The Supernatural Thread in Methodism*, 46.

⁹⁷ Billman, *The Supernatural Thread in Methodism*, 48.

⁹⁸ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, Vol. 2, 519.

⁹⁹ John Cennick, “An Account of the Most Remarkable occurrences in the Awakenings at Bristol and Kingswood,” *The Moravian Messenger*, Vol. 16; cited in Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield*, Vol. 1 (London, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), 326 and Billman, 48.

supernatural atmospheres in which those gathered experienced salvation, sanctification, healing, and deliverance.

Lay Leadership and Small Groups: A Laboratory of the Spirit

Wesley discovered that, despite the popularity and draw of field preaching, it was in small groups that people experienced deliverance, recovery, and liberty.¹⁰⁰ This discipleship model helped move people from participation in the Methodist Society to classes and bands, with increasing depth and commitment. It was also in these small groups that people experienced confession, forgiveness, and accountability. This discipleship process, upon which the Methodist movement was built and sustained, relied heavily upon lay leadership. Wesley focused on the social nature of Christianity and saw people as channels of God's grace.¹⁰¹

Lay persons were empowered to lead within the Methodist movement as ministers. Though they were not licensed or titled, they were intentionally deployed in ministry. Wesley chose persons with the gifts and influence needed to connect with their community, sending them out in pairs to visit those with spiritual or physical needs.¹⁰² Not only were they to meet with people and inquire into their needs, but these lay ministers were directed to ask about the state of people's souls, offering advice as needed and bringing relief as they were able.¹⁰³ These laypersons were entrusted with the work

¹⁰⁰ Harrold, "Contextual Churches in History," 43.

¹⁰¹ Harrold, "Contextual Churches in History," 43.

¹⁰² Harrold, "Contextual Churches in History," 45.

¹⁰³ Harrold, "Contextual Churches in History," 45.

of the Church; they were authorized and unleashed to use their gifts, meet needs, and solve problems.

Small group gatherings served as a laboratory where God's Spirit was free to move. In many modern churches, the gifts of the Spirit are little used or modeled. This may be partially due to worship services being planned to the minute in a performance model or to small groups finding themselves stuck in a rut when following curriculum. In many cases, our gatherings are so programmed that there is little wiggle room for the Holy Spirit to move.

Lay Preachers

When Thomas Maxfield began preaching without permission, Wesley initially planned to put an end to it. However, his mother, Susanna, told her son, "Take care what you do with respect to that young man, for he is as surely called of God to preach, as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching, and hear him also yourself."¹⁰⁴

Wesley eventually grew more comfortable with lay preachers, but the movement took heat due to their lack of education.¹⁰⁵ The most controversial aspect of these lay preachers was the inclusion of unofficial, though effective, women preachers.¹⁰⁶

Wesley's reliance upon lay preachers was partly due to a lack of support from Anglican

¹⁰⁴ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 108.

¹⁰⁵ Collins, *A Real Christian*, 73-4. Anglican clergy were especially critical of these lay preachers.

¹⁰⁶ Ditchfield, *The Evangelical Revival*, 64.

clergy. The pattern was that Wesley would preach, set up a local society, and then appoint a local lay preacher to that circuit.¹⁰⁷

Wesley's releasing of lay preachers into ministry brought relief from the oppressive control of the religious hierarchy that had suppressed the move of the Spirit and the rivers of living water flowing from God's people (see John 7:38). As the role of clergy increased throughout church history, the ministry of spiritually gifted laypersons decreased. Anglican historian William DeArteaga writes that "the Catholic ritual of anointing the sick took healing out of the hands of lay people and institutionalized it, restricting it to clergy."¹⁰⁸ When ministry is seen as the right and privilege of professionals rather than the work of the people, the flow of the Spirit is limited to a trickle.

Examples of the Supernatural in Early Methodism

In his book, *The Supernatural Occurrences of John Wesley*, Daniel R. Jennings explores experiences reported in Wesley's journal, many of which have been largely untouched by Wesleyan scholars. Whereas the theology of Wesley is much discussed, it is rare to hear of Wesley's run-ins with demoniacs and his experience of spiritual warfare. A few examples are shared below in Wesley's own words. These reports are conveyed without an ounce of sensationalism; Wesley presents his role in the events with humility and tells the stories with some measure of curiosity and even uncertainty.

¹⁰⁷ Ditchfield, *The Evangelical Revival*, 63-4.

¹⁰⁸ William DeArteaga, *Quenching the Spirit* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 1996), 64.

God's Word Speaks

Wesley writes on numerous occasions of being reprimanded or redirected by Scripture, as well as wrestling with an issue and discovering that Scripture speaks to it. In one case, Wesley writes, “But while I was musing, what would be the issue of these things, the answer I received from the word of God was . . . ”¹⁰⁹ Such instances demonstrate a dynamic relationship in which God is experienced as present and self-revealing through Scripture.

Healing Ministry

Wesley sometimes indicates an awareness of people's skepticism in his accounts of miraculous events, as is seen in the case of a physician who told Wesley that he did not expect a man to live until morning. Wesley went to the man on his deathbed, found that his pulse was gone, and then joined with others in prayer. Eventually, the man's senses and speech returned. Wesley writes, “Now, he that will account for this by natural causes, has my free leave: But I choose to say, This is the power of God . . . ”¹¹⁰

Manifestations of the Spirit

Jennings states that “John Wesley's ministry was characterized by the Holy Spirit dealing with unsaved people in very unusual ways. The unsaved were sometimes hit by strong guilt, weeping, convulsions and other physical affects to their bodies.”¹¹¹ Among

¹⁰⁹ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 1:3.

¹¹⁰ December 20, 1742

¹¹¹ Jennings, *The Supernatural Occurrences of John Wesley*, 86.

the signs of God's presence in Wesley's meetings were laughter (both holy and unholy), being "slain in the Spirit" (sometimes referred to as "resting in the Spirit"), and the gift of speaking in tongues.

Manifestations of the Spirit were experienced when God was sensed to be particularly present or as people experienced conviction. When God is at work, the atmosphere becomes supernaturally charged. Wesley writes, "The power of God (so I call it) came so mightily among us, that one, and another, and another, fell down as thunderstruck . . ."¹¹² As people were slain in the Spirit, some wrestled in conviction of sin. According to Wesley, "such a cry was heard, of sinners groaning for righteousness of faith, as almost drowned my voice. But many of these soon lifted their heads with joy, and broke out into thanksgiving; being assured they now had the desire of their soul,—the forgiveness of their sins."¹¹³ While these experiences often came during a time of conviction or as evidence of an inner spiritual battle, in other instances, those gathered rested in the glory of God's presence. The duration of these instances varied, sometimes lasting for hours or more, but this time opened a door for intense spiritual work and transformation. On another occasion, a man "sunk down as dead. He was cold as clay. After about ten minutes he came to himself, and cried, 'A new heart, a new heart!'"¹¹⁴

¹¹² Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley, Letter to His Brother Samuel*, 12, May 1, 1739.

¹¹³ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 12 June, 1742, 1:5.

¹¹⁴ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 26 July, 1762, 3:12:2.

Deliverance Ministry

Far from the sensational Hollywood depictions of exorcisms in horror films, deliverance is an act of Christlike compassion and mercy. Only a month before Wesley's Fetter Lane experience, he demonstrated a keen desire to see the captives set free. On December 5, 1738, Wesley encountered a young woman whom he believed was experiencing demonic influence. As Wesley told her that "Jesus of Nazareth is able and willing to deliver you," tears ran down her cheeks. Wesley reflected on this experience, saying, "O where is faith upon earth? Why are these poor wretches left under the open bondage of Satan? Jesus, master! Give thou medicine to heal their sickness and deliver those who are now also vexed with unclean spirits!"¹¹⁵

However, it was not the Church of England's practice to provide this level of spiritual relief and freedom. In fact, if an Anglican priest were to perform unsanctioned exorcisms, they risked suspension and ex-communication.¹¹⁶ Between this demonstration of ecclesiastical control and the spiritual climate of the day, it would have been easy to abandon the ministry of deliverance altogether.

On October 25, 1739, Wesley wrote of a woman who "lay on the ground, furiously gnashing her teeth, and after a while roared aloud. It was not easy for three or four persons to hold her, especially when the name of Jesus was named."¹¹⁷ After prayer, her violence ceased, but Wesley indicates that she was "without a complete deliverance." Upon being sent for again, Wesley writes:

¹¹⁵ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, vol 19, 5 December 1738, 23.

¹¹⁶ Webster, *Methodism and the Miraculous*, 80.

¹¹⁷ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 1:3.

I was unwilling, indeed, afraid, to go: Thinking it would not avail, unless some who were strong in faith were to wrestle with God for her. I opened my Testament on those words,” I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth.” I stood reproved and went immediately. She began screaming before I came into the room; then broke out into a horrid laughter, mixed with blasphemy, grievous to hear. . . . My brother coming in, she cried out, “Preacher! Field preacher! I don’t love field-preaching.” This was repeated two hours together, with spitting, and all the expressions of strong aversion. We left her at twelve, but called again about noon on Friday, 26. And now it was that God showed He heareth the prayer. All her pangs ceased in a moment: She was filled with peace, and knew that the son of wickedness was departed from her.¹¹⁸

This is an encouraging example for Christians today, for whom the supernatural may be uncomfortable or frightening. Wesley wrestled with his own discomfort and feeling of inadequacy but ultimately obeyed God’s prompting to move beyond his comfort zone to bring freedom and wholeness to those in need. It is evident that the early Methodist movement was a supernatural movement. As Peter Bellini contends, “Pentecostals do not have copyrights on the Holy Spirit. Methodists are also Holy Spirit people, and we can participate in the current global outpouring of the Spirit that is going on among ‘renewalists’ and other types on every continent.”¹¹⁹

Conclusion

John Wesley is commonly heralded by United Methodists as a devoted and diligent disciple-maker. Yet while Methodists focus on Wesley’s giftedness in creating a system of discipleship, we often overlook the supernatural element of this movement. It should not be surprising that we focus on systems over Spirit, as systems can be

¹¹⁸ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 1:3.

¹¹⁹ Peter Bellini, “Methodism and the Holy Spirit,” *Academia*, 2.
https://www.academia.edu/15282393/METHODISM_AND_THE_HOLY_SPIRIT

controlled and manipulated. We forget that the systems of our denomination were meant to provide structure for the Spirit's work, not serve as a substitute for the Spirit.

It is common for present-day churches to obsess over implementing new models and practices for bringing people to faith as if spiritual transformation could be accomplished through natural methods. We should ask ourselves whether our greatest desire is for people to become new members of an institution or to experience new birth by the Spirit. The answer may explain why we often neglect the importance of supernatural ministry.

A powerful quote by John Wesley is etched into the base of a bronze statue bearing his image at Asbury Theological Seminary:

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.¹²⁰

In this time of theological confusion and pluralism, many church leaders will allow just about anything into the church . . . except the power of God.¹²¹ And in a time in which the United Methodist Church is embroiled in conflict, gasping for air, and looking for exits, our focus is misplaced if we are preoccupied with survival. Wesley would direct—or more likely demand—that we realign our message with that of early Methodism. If we are to inspect the fruit of our movement, as Wesley regularly did, we must ask ourselves whether we see the power of God demonstrated through supernatural ministry bearing the

¹²⁰ Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, “Thoughts Upon Methodism,” 4 August, 1786, 13.

¹²¹ Inspired by Revivalist Jessi Green’s comment via Instagram on May 23, 2021, about being uninvited to speak at a conference due to her belief regarding the work and empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

fruit of salvation, sanctification, healing, deliverance, and transformation. Without supernatural fruit, we may find that we are performing CPR on a dead form of religion when our greatest need is for the Holy Spirit to breathe upon us and cause these dry bones to live once again (Ezek. 37:4-10).

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The lack of Spirit-empowered missionaries for today's mission field stems from theological influences that are either prohibitive of the work of the Spirit or silent on the subject altogether. Training based on a weak theology of the Spirit will lead to ineffective ministry, especially if we desire to operate in spiritual gifts and continue Jesus' work of healing and deliverance. If we are to equip Spirit-empowered disciples to reap a bountiful harvest, we must unearth and unlearn theology that is not aligned with the ministry of Jesus and the witness of Scripture.

Jesus viewed supernatural practices such as healing and deliverance as signs of the arrival of the kingdom of God,¹ and yet many modern-day proclaimers of God's kingdom view such signs as optional and, in some cases, undesired. Jesus called and authorized the twelve to continue the supernatural ministry that was foundational within his own work.² This supernatural standard of ministry is further expounded upon by the Apostle Paul, who claimed that he would not "speak of anything except what Christ has

¹ Luke 10:9; 11:20.

² For those who would limit this supernatural calling to the twelve, note that Jesus gives similar instructions to the 72 disciples in Luke 10.

accomplished . . . by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God” (Rom. 15:18-19).

Richard Foster views Paul as one of the great representatives of the charismatic tradition in that Paul provided a rational, expertly written depiction of the Gospel interwoven with a practical understanding and dependency upon the fruit and work of the Spirit.³ The Apostle Paul, like Jesus and the twelve, demonstrated a balanced expression of word and deed, undergirded by the power of the Spirit of God. However, this show-and-tell style of ministry has been abbreviated by large segments of Christianity to the point that Gospel proclamation has become an exercise in making truth claims stripped of experiential incarnation.

There is a great gulf between our well-intentioned truth claims and a Gospel proclamation revealed through signs of the kingdom. Our world is weary of words but is open to experience. The Methodist/Wesleyan heritage of Christianity is well-suited to provide this more experiential expression of the Gospel of Christ. Foster, in his presentation of the six traditions of Christianity, writes, “While the Holiness Tradition centers upon the power *to be*, the Charismatic Tradition centers upon the power *to do*.”⁴ Both the holiness and charismatic traditions are dependent upon the presence and power

³ Richard J. Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Essential Practices from the Six Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 106. Foster notes that the Apostle Paul was able to present the “most carefully reasoned theological treatise in the New Testament” (Romans), as well as the “finest practical teaching on exercising the spiritual gifts...” (First Corinthians).

⁴ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 99. Foster writes, “These two traditions *should* work hand-in-glove and *should* fuel each other” 103. The six great traditions of the Christian faith, according to Foster, are the contemplative tradition, the holiness tradition, the charismatic tradition, the social justice tradition, the evangelical tradition, and the incarnational tradition. Each tradition, or stream, is presented as valuable and essential for Christian faith and practice. Foster’s book is an excellent starting place for those unfamiliar with the charismatic tradition.

of the Holy Spirit within one's life, the former to develop Christ-like character and the latter to participate in the miraculous power of Christ.

The holy, or virtuous, life is meant to be accompanied by the Spirit-empowered life, and vice versa.⁵ It just so happens that the holiness tradition is foundational to the Methodist theological tradition, and the charismatic tradition features prominently in the practice of early Methodism (though the term was unknown at the time). While holiness is not the focus of this paper, it should be noted that if we are to participate fully in the show-and-tell nature of the Gospel of Christ, the supernatural work of the Spirit should be evidenced within both the interior orientation of one's life through personal sanctification and the outward orientation of one's life through supernatural works.

A common and too often accurate critique of Christianity is that of hypocrisy. This critique reveals the de-supernaturalized nature of the Church today. The failure to practice what we preach is a failure to proclaim the Gospel through both word and deed. Further, a biblical understanding of deeds refers not to humanistic do-gooding but instead reveals a fusion of Spirit-sanctified character with Spirit-empowered works.⁶ If we fail to show forth the truth of the Gospel through lives sanctified and empowered by the Spirit, we will continue to find that our sermonizing falls on deaf ears.

Christian living devoid of the Spirit's influence is unbiblical and theologically anemic; "Signs and wonders, miracles and healings, revelations and visions" are meant to

⁵ Richard Foster refers to the Holiness Tradition as the virtuous life and the Charismatic Tradition as the Spirit-empowered life.

⁶ Christian traditions often focus on either the Fruit of the Spirit or the Gifts of the Spirit. More mainline churches focus on spiritual fruit, whereas more charismatic churches focus on spiritual gifts. As the fruit of the Spirit develops the character of Christ and as the gifts of the Spirit empower us to do the works of Christ, it is imperative that the Universal Church recognizes that if we do not embrace both the gifts and the fruit, we will have neither the fullness of the Spirit nor the fullness of Christ.

evidence life in the Spirit while empowering Christians for both witness and service.⁷

When Christians instead grasp for the latest methods to argue the veracity of their message, a skeptical world looks on with detachment and disinterest. Therefore, we must uncover and unlearn theological foundations that obscure Jesus' supernatural ministry model.

Jon Mark Ruthven quips, "If you don't want to get nauseous, there are three things you never want to see made: laws, sausage, and theology!"⁸ Nevertheless, this chapter will endeavor to do just that by tracing out theological developments which have progressively devalued or sidelined supernatural beliefs and practices, including the schism between the Eastern and Western Church, Reformation theology, liberal theology and the effect of cessationism. But first, grounding is needed regarding how we understand the supernatural in the context of this paper.

Theological Movements

What is the Supernatural?

It is the intention of this paper to speak to the theology of the supernatural from an explicitly Christian perspective. While supernatural realities do exist outside of Christian theology and theopraxy, including the paranormal, magic, and occultic practices, this work focuses on the supernatural as it may be appropriately experienced within

⁷ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 129.

⁸ Jon Mark Ruthven, *What's Wrong with Protestant Theology?: Tradition vs. Biblical Emphasis* (Tulsa, OK: Word & Spirit Press, 2013), 7.

Christianity. Christian expressions of the supernatural include spiritual gifts, signs and wonders, deliverance, revelation, and experiences of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Additional terminology may be exchanged for the word “supernatural,” though with slightly different emphases, including Spirit-empowered, Spirit-filled, charismatic, and pentecostal (pertaining to the Acts 2 experience of the Spirit rather than to Pentecostal denominations).

Our understanding of the supernatural must be built upon a faithful theology of the Holy Spirit. However, as Elizabeth Johnson asserts, the Holy Spirit has become “the forgotten God” in many Christian faith communities:

The cumulative effect of this rather meager Western pneumatological tradition has been the full range of the reality and activity of God the Spirit has been virtually lost from much of Christian theological consciousness. As Herbert Mühlen observes, when most of us say God, the Holy Spirit never comes immediately to mind; rather, the Spirit seems like an edifying appendage to the doctrine of God. Without a proper name, the Spirit is widely acknowledged by theologians today, usually in colorful language, to be the forgotten God. The Spirit is “faceless,” as Walter Kasper phrases it; something “shadowy,” in John Macquarrie’s words; even “ghostly,” a vague something or other according to Georgia Harkness. Of the three divine persons the Spirit is the most “anonymous,” in Norman Pittenger’s view, indeed the “poor relation” in the Trinity. Many have written of Spirit as the “unknown” or at least the “half-known” God, as Yves Congar has pointed out. In Joseph Ratzinger’s analysis, doctrine about the Holy Spirit has gone “homeless” in the West; when it does appear, Wolfhart Pannenberg notes, it seems curiously “watered down” from its biblical fullness. G.J. Sirks even calls the doctrine of the Spirit the “Cinderella” of theology.⁹

This poor grounding in pneumatology leads to a shallow understanding of the Spirit.

Additionally, cultural and religious influences contribute to a misunderstanding of the Spirit.

⁹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017), 130.

All mention of the Spirit in this paper is intended to denote the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Trinity. Popular ways of understanding the Spirit not supported by this paper include viewing the Spirit as an impersonal force disconnected from the holy Third Person of the Trinity, as a pluralistic understanding of the divine, or as a method of bolstering one's personal viewpoint or agenda. In such cases, the Spirit of God is purportedly set at odds with the Word of God. It is therefore important to root our understanding of the Spirit within the New Testament understanding of the Holy Spirit.

Because the supernatural realm remains unfamiliar and confusing to many Christians, it is helpful to identify supernatural experiences that are accepted within mainline congregations, though it is unlikely that they would be labeled as such. Conviction of sin, salvation, sanctification, prayer, and a sacramental understanding of Holy Communion and Baptism reveal the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit. Each experience is dependent upon a God who is able, present, and willing to work in our lives. This speaks to the omnipotence, immanence, and benevolence of God. Although the popular understanding of the supernatural may turn to the more sensational, the foundational Christian experiences mentioned above have supernatural threads that, when acknowledged and properly attributed, should open the door for further revelation and reception of the work of the Spirit.

Supernatural experiences are dependent upon divine agency and received through active passivity. This form of passivity is neither idle nor slothful. Rather, it is actively expectant and in a state of readiness to receive. Such passivity flies in the face of

humanism and moralistic therapeutic deism.¹⁰ Cathal Doherty emphasizes the importance of divine efficacy over human activity by fleshing out the supernatural nature of the sacraments. As sacramental theology is an esteemed and cherished example of the supernatural activity of God within my faith tradition, this is worth exploring. Consider Doherty's comments regarding "sacramental realism" as illustrating not only key components of sacramental theology but also of the larger category of supernatural theology:

Recall that the principle of differentiation between sacraments and other human action lies not in any human contribution, but in the fact that they are *revealed* as bringing about real and supernatural change, irreducible to any natural capacity in human reason and will alone. Sacraments are differentiated from other human actions only because they are revealed as issuing from the divine initiative that places the supernatural gift in them. Sacraments do not operate on God. Rather, God reveals that they are specifically and decisively objective sources of grace in a way that other religious practices are not, even for the most pious practitioner.¹¹

Drawing from Doherty's insightful work on the subject,¹² these principles can be expanded and applied to supernatural theology as follows: Supernatural acts, from the use of spiritual gifts to the demonstration of signs and wonders, are a revelation of God's activity within a person, place, or situation. Unlike magic, supernatural ministry never twists the arm of God to achieve a desired end but instead receives God's supernatural grace in active, expectant openness. Conversely, unlike superstitious belief, supernatural ministry is not impeded by the limitations or mistakes of the human vessels through

¹⁰ Cathal Doherty, *Maurice Blondel on the Supernatural in Human Action: Sacrament and Superstition*, Brill's Studies in Catholic Theology, V. 4 (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2017), 179. Doherty presents Maurice Blondel's concept of "supernatural realism" as God's efficacious works of grace that go beyond moralistic motivation, which seek to affect moral behavior. Additionally, I have previously discussed moral therapeutic deism in my historical foundations paper, drawing from Leroy Huizenga's "What is Moral Therapeutic Deism and Why Does it Fail?"

¹¹ Doherty, *Maurice Blondel on the Supernatural in Human Action*, 179.

¹² Doherty, *Maurice Blondel on the Supernatural in Human Action*, 178-79.

whom God's Spirit flows. Supernatural ministry begins with and returns to God, for it is always from God and for the glory of God. Like the simple, everyday elements of bread and juice employed in the sacrament of Holy Communion, we are merely the humble and profoundly grateful vessels through whom God's grace flows. This understanding should strengthen our faith and ease our anxiety through the realization that we are neither the source nor the focus of the supernatural.¹³

For congregations founded upon Wesleyan theology, the emphasis on grace through sacramental theology, as well as through the *ordo salutis* (sequence of salvation), should serve as a steadfast reminder of God's supernatural work in the Church today. However, in many cases, the popular understanding of grace no longer includes an expectation of the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. Worse still, the pursuit of the Christian life is often based more on mental assent and moral obedience than upon the transforming work of the Spirit. It is important, therefore, to identify the theological roots and influences that have derailed Christianity from a vital experience of the Spirit.

The Earliest Sidelining of the Spirit

Any explicitly Christian discussion of the supernatural should begin with the Holy Spirit. Throughout the history of Christianity, individuals, entities, and movements have sought to dismiss and demean both the Person and work of the Spirit, significantly altering the nature and orientation of the Church. The earliest persons who sought to

¹³ Doherty's view of the sacraments, which I have applied to the larger theology of the supernatural, aligns with my conviction that surrender and vulnerability are essential to the practice of supernatural ministry (see my previous Biblical Foundations chapter). However, for a challenge to the position that humans have no role beyond simply receiving grace, see Karl Rahner's work on the subject. I do believe that humanity plays a role in supernatural ministry, but due to the prevalent humanistic emphasis on doing good works in our own strength, I choose to err on the side of surrender and vulnerability.

challenge the significance of the Holy Spirit may have been Aetius and Eunomius, fourth-century Arians who argued that the Son and Spirit do not share the same or even similar substance with the Father. Eunomius, among others known as the Pneumatomachi or “fighters against the Holy Spirit,” viewed the Spirit as third in rank, dignity, and nature.¹⁴

Eastern and Western Theology of the Spirit

The value placed upon the supernatural begins with our theology of the Spirit, a subject to which Eastern Orthodox voices have much to contribute. Myk Habets describes how Eastern theology elevates the role of the Spirit as pertaining not only to pneumatology but also to soteriology:

Salvation is a matter of “acquiring the Holy Spirit” to quote St. Seraphim of Sarov. Purification, illumination, and the union are the stages the Holy Spirit takes the believer through in the journey back to the Father. By contrast, in the West we have tended to lean heavily on the metaphor of incorporation into Christ.”¹⁵

Habets further explains the practical subordination of the Spirit as found within Western pneumatology:

Vladimir Lossky alleged that Western theologians treated the Holy Spirit as the lieutenant of Christ, the subaltern who runs his errands and does his bidding, but who receives little attention or regard in his own right. Similarly, within the Triune life the role of the Spirit was reduced to being a kind of gopher who shuttles back and forth between the Father and the Son resourcing their life, and staying out of the limelight.¹⁶

¹⁴ Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit: The River of the Water of Life Flows in the East and in the West* Volume III (London, UK: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983), 29.

¹⁵ Myk Habets, *The Spirit of Truth: Reading Scripture and Constructing Theology with the Holy Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010), 112.

¹⁶ Habets, *The Spirit of Truth*, 113.

Discordant views on the Holy Spirit within Western and Eastern thinking are due, in part, to their particular synthesis of Christology and Pneumatology. The reduced role of the Spirit, as reflected in the Western Church, appears to place the Spirit in a secondary role. Fr. Kilian McDonnell wrote poignantly that Western theology thinks in Christological categories, regarding “the Holy Spirit as an extra, an addendum, a ‘false’ window to give symmetry and balance to the theological design . . . We decorate the already constructed system with pneumatological baubles, a little Spirit tinsel.”¹⁷ Habets similarly states that for Western theology, “the church is an ecclesial structure brought into existence by Christ, to which is later added the ingredient Holy Spirit. But to Eastern Orthodoxy, the church is first and foremost a charismatic community brought into existence by the action of the Spirit.”¹⁸ It becomes increasingly apparent that Eastern and Western Christianity view the Holy Spirit through different lenses. While each tradition speaks a common theological language, each also places different weights and emphases upon Christology and pneumatology.

The differing perspectives of the Holy Spirit within the Eastern and Western mindsets are illustrated by the theological feud over the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed, which identifies the Holy Spirit as proceeding not only from the Father but also

¹⁷ Kilian McDonnell, “The Determinative Doctrine of the Holy Spirit,” *Theology Today* 39:2 (1982): 1.

¹⁸ Habets, *The Spirit of Truth*, 113. Habets is drawing on the work of John Zizioulas in *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church (Contemporary Greek Theologians Series, No 4)*, 132.

from the Son.¹⁹ The *filioque* clause, created by Tertullian and further developed by Augustine, may well reveal a pneumatological deficit of Western theology.²⁰

The Nicene Creed, as originally drafted, specified the Holy Spirit as flowing from the Father. However, the Western Church revised the text in the sixth century with the addition that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son; this was officially adopted by the Catholic Church in 1014 and retained by churches of the Reformation.²¹ The *filioque* clause, in what could be considered excessive tinkering, jeopardizes the “mysterious equivalence” of the Trinity.²²

The strongest objection to the *filioque* clause is that, due to the double procession of the Spirit from the Father and Son, the clause challenges the equality of the Divine Persons. According to Michelle Coetzee, by placing the Spirit on a different level as the only Person of the Trinity without the power of procession, the dignity of the Spirit is compromised.²³ While Nikk Effingham convincingly argues that causation does not necessarily lead to subordination²⁴ (admittedly there is adequate theological support for both Eastern and Western perspectives on the matter), the *filioque* clause debate

¹⁹ Nikk Effingham, “The Philosophy of Filioque,” *Religious Studies* 54, no. 3 (2018), 288. The term *filioque* is Latin for “and [from] the son.”

²⁰ Habets, *The Spirit of Truth*, 113.

²¹ Ian A. McFarland, *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 187.

²² Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 1991), 63.

²³ Michelle Coetzee, *The Filioque Impasse: Patristic Roots, Perspectives on Philosophy and Religious Thought*, 6 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2012), 38.

²⁴ Effingham, “The Philosophy of Filioque,” 302. While I would concede that there is adequate theological support for both Eastern and Western perspectives on the *filioque* clause debate, I would nevertheless maintain that study of this controversy is key to evaluating the unique pneumatological understandings of the East and West.

nonetheless displays a notable rift between the Eastern and Western Church on the Person of the Holy Spirit. Coetzee further writes that “The East-West impasse over the *filioque* is not simply a misunderstanding. . . . The *filioque* represents a significant divergence in thought between the two traditions’ conceptions of the Trinity” arising from the divergent approaches of Augustine and the Cappadocian Fathers.²⁵ This was the fundamental breach between the Eastern and Western Church, from which all subsequent doctrinal differences flowed.²⁶

Johnson observes that although the Spirit is often the first and most intimate way in which God is experienced, the Holy Spirit was the last to be named as explicitly divine in Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of A.D. 381.²⁷ Even with this creedal confession, the Third Person of the Trinity still received little attention. Johnson elaborates:

In most patristic texts and in Western medieval treatises after the split with the East, the Spirit is dealt with “in third place” after questions of divine creation and redemption and the intricate relationship of the Father and Son have been explored in detail. Perhaps the understanding of Spirit receives such short shrift due to this placement itself, coming at the end when a great deal about divinity and God’s ways with the world has already been explicitly discussed. Perhaps, especially in the West, the neglect is due to the nature of the thought systems that emphasize divine transcendence in a less than relational way. Perhaps toward the end of their long constructive treatises theologians simply got tired.²⁸

²⁵ Coetzee, *The Filioque Impasse*, 2-3.

²⁶ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 56.

²⁷ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 128. Johnson places the blame on Aquinas for not identifying a proper name for the Spirit, which led to the privatization of the Spirit within Pietism.

²⁸ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 128.

She further states that the “cumulative effect of this meager Western pneumatological tradition has been that the full range of the reality and activity of God the Spirit has been virtually lost from much of Christian theological consciousness.”²⁹

The consequences of divided Christendom continue today.³⁰ The tendency to “separate matter and spirit, nature and supernature” in a dualistic manner bears witness to yet another Western propensity. Doherty, however, posits that “The Christian doctrines about the sacraments, as well as the Incarnation and the idea of a historical Revelation, run counter to this tendency and are even ‘scandalous’ to it.”³¹ This Western rejection of the interaction between the natural and supernatural is further expressed through the Protestant Reformation and eventually in Enlightenment philosophy.³²

Doherty equates the supernatural with the doctrine of grace, presenting the inherent question of whether humanity may experience real grace without a dynamic experience of the Holy Spirit. For many Christians, the concept of grace is just that: a concept. However, if our experience of grace does not move beyond the rational world into supernatural experience, then grace provides no real blessing or benefit from God. Such thinking within dualistic theology and Enlightenment philosophy leads to an impoverished understanding of salvation. Although the effects of Enlightenment philosophy will be more fully explained in the next chapter, the strands of Western theology are so entwined with Enlightenment thinking that Doherty’s description of the

²⁹ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 130.

³⁰ Yves Congar, *Chrétiens désunis: Principes d'un "Oecuménisme" Catholique*, Paris, 1937, 15. English translation by M.A. Bousfield, *Divided Christendom*, London, 1939.

³¹ Doherty, *Maurice Blondel on the Supernatural in Human Action*, 1.

³² Doherty, *Maurice Blondel on the Supernatural in Human Action*, 2.

consequences of dualistic thinking as embodied by Immanuel Kant's Enlightenment philosophy deserves attention here:

For Kant, the true stuff of religion is the human moral relationship with God. The supernatural, or the doctrine of grace is effectively banished from human life and reduced to purely rational human intentionality. In common with most Enlightenment thinkers, Kant brooks no universal application of particular and contingent historical facts, and so dismisses the idea of a true Revelation, in the sense of a real divine intervention in any particular human history and tradition. Moreover, the salvific power of the Incarnation, for Kant, lies not in the historical person of Jesus Christ, of whom one can have no direct knowledge as Savior, but in the idea of Christ as perfect moral archetype, a saving Idea, accessible to the powers of pure reason. There is absolutely no room for sacraments in such a view of the human relationship with God. There is also no room for a doctrine of grace.³³

This assertion is monumental in that it cuts through theological confusion to reveal a de-supernaturalized belief system. Without the supernatural, there is no grace. Perhaps there is a moralistic concept of grace, but not a divine working grace. In a theological domino effect, once the theology of the supernatural falls, any sense of the real presence and activity of God is toppled along with it. Even salvation is divorced from the person and work of Jesus Christ and replaced with a saving Christ Idea. This dualistic separation of the natural and supernatural into silos leads to a neat and tidy, if powerless, expression of the Christian faith.

Roman Catholic Theology

We will now turn to the role of the Holy Spirit as understood within Post-Tridentine Catholicism, notably the displacement of the function of the Holy Spirit by

³³ Doherty, *Maurice Blondel on the Supernatural in Human Action*, 1-2.

that of the Pope, the Virgin Mary, and the Mass.³⁴ Although Yves Congar, the Dominican cardinal and theologian, upholds Mariology as well as papal infallibility and the role of the Spirit in the Eucharist, he does express concern over extreme examples such as the claim that Mary has authority over the procession of the Spirit to the degree that no one receives grace except through her.³⁵ Perhaps the most obvious substitution for the Spirit is seen in the understanding of the Virgin Mary, in which she assumes what was originally the role and nature of the Spirit; Mary is viewed as “intercessor, mediatrix, helper, advocate, defender, consoler, and counselor, functions that biblically belong to the Paraclete (John 14:16 and 26; 15:26; 16:7).”³⁶ For Protestants, it certainly feels that we find Mary everywhere we expect to find the Holy Spirit.³⁷

Randy Clark identifies several theological developments within Roman Catholicism that deserve attention. First, corporate participation in the life of the Spirit was thwarted due to a transfer of power from the body of Christ to those called to a religious vocation, with the extreme and dangerous result that laity could be accused of witchcraft for operating in spiritual gifts.³⁸ Johnson refers to this as the institutionalizing of the Spirit.³⁹ Secondly, sickness became linked with carrying one’s cross, so that faithful persons were encouraged to embrace suffering for redemptive purposes rather

³⁴ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 129. Post-Tridentine Catholicism represents the Catholic Church after the Council of Trent held in the mid-16th century as an embodiment of the Counter Reformation.

³⁵ Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit: The Experience of the Spirit* Volume I (London, UK: Geoffrey Chapman, 1983), 163-4.

³⁶ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 129.

³⁷ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 129-30.

³⁸ Randy Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams* (Shippensburg, PA: Global Awakening, 2013), 44.

³⁹ Johnson, *She Who Is*, 129.

than to seek supernatural relief.⁴⁰ A modern adaption of this would be John Hick's soul-making theodicy which seeks to defend the "omnipotence, omniscience, and all-goodness of God in the face of evil" through the view that evil is used by God in the second stage of creation of humanity, or as the "soul-making process" of children of God.⁴¹ Third, miracles ceased to be viewed as an expression of Gospel proclamation and were instead viewed as authentication of doctrine.⁴² And finally, a detrimental shift within the Catholic Church occurred with the transition from a "warfare worldview" to a "blueprint worldview," as Augustine's predestinarian belief system overshadowed the view that a cosmic spiritual battle is raging between light and darkness.⁴³ This reinforced the belief that human suffering serves God's redemptive purposes, as well as the fear that seeking divine intervention could be against God's will. We see evidence that the above paradigm shifts remain operative in the church today as laypersons feel unqualified to operate in gifts of the Spirit and as those enduring suffering ask what God is trying to teach them through their pain. Cessationism promotes the verdict that the canonization of the New Testament fulfills the purpose of the supernatural and the tendency to accept and surrender to circumstances as representative of God's will rather than seek God's healing and deliverance.

⁴⁰ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 45. See Luke 9:23.

⁴¹ Leo K.C. Cheung, "A Zhuangzian Critique of John Hick's Theodicy" (Sophia: International Journal of Philosophy and Traditions 59, no. 3 (2019): 550-1.

⁴² Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 45. See Ephesians 6:12-13.

⁴³ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 46.

The Protestant Reformation

We will now turn to the Protestant Reformation, which shifted the theological landscape from immanence to transcendence, specifically as Lutheran and Calvinist reformers interpreted supernatural experiences within Roman Catholicism to be pagan and heretical.⁴⁴ Counter-Reformation Catholics understandably wrestled with the portrayal of their supernatural beliefs as superstitious, their faith as idolatrous, and their allegiance as allies of the devil.⁴⁵

In an attempt to defend Scriptural authority, Reformation theology sought to deny the work of the Spirit as expressed through miracles and revelatory gifts, which were feared as having the potential of sanctioning new doctrines.⁴⁶ Sadly, in their attempt to defend Scripture against false doctrine, those influenced by the Reformation rejected Scripture's emphasis upon the work of the Spirit through spiritual gifts, miracles, and revelation.⁴⁷ The Reformers were caught between the Roman Catholic Church, which boasted miracles and revelation as evidence of their legitimacy, and the Radical Reformation, which rejected Church Tradition and in some cases even the Bible.⁴⁸ What both the Roman Catholic Church and the Radical Reformation held in common was their reliance upon the Holy Spirit to guide and legitimate their beliefs and a fear that the Holy

⁴⁴ Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1900-1939*. Numen Book Series: Studies in the History of Religions, Volume 147 (Boston, MA: Brill, 2014), 1.

⁴⁵ Francis Young, *English Catholics and the Supernatural, 1553-1829*. Catholic Christendom, 1300-1700 (London, UK: Taylor and Francis Group, 2016), 26.

⁴⁶ Ruthven, *What's Wrong with Protestant Theology*, 3.

⁴⁷ Ruthven, *What's Wrong with Protestant Theology*, 3.

⁴⁸ Ruthven, *What's Wrong with Protestant Theology*, 10-1.

Spirit would legitimate the beliefs of the other. This led Roman Catholics and Protestants alike to reject the evidence of the work of the Spirit outside their tradition.⁴⁹

Martin Luther, the Father of the Reformation, was conflicted in his view of the supernatural. This was complicated by his rejection of abuses of the doctrine of the supernatural within Catholicism and his fear of being judged by others for his own supernatural beliefs. Luther became skeptical regarding whether supernatural acts came from God, though he did believe that the devil was active in the world. In addition to other supernatural experiences, Luther had an encounter in which he threw his inkstand at the devil when interrupted while translating Scripture.⁵⁰

Luther's *Sola Scriptura* was meant to locate authority within unchanging Scripture rather than within Church Tradition or subjective experience.⁵¹ By contrast, John Calvin's response to this battle for authority was to develop the view that miracles and gifts of the Spirit ended within the apostolic period, thereby invalidating the miracles reported within the Catholic Church and dismissing the doctrinal beliefs which those miracles were thought to prove.⁵²

And yet, contrary to the cessationist movement that he sparked, Calvin was partially open to the gifts in that he believed spiritual gifts are needed to establish the Gospel among new people groups. Again, this was due to the view that the supernatural was meant to authenticate doctrinal truths. However, Calvin believed that these gifts

⁴⁹ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 55-6.

⁵⁰ William Howitt, *The History of the Supernatural in All Ages and Nations* Vol. 2, Cambridge Library Collection – Spiritualism and Esoteric Knowledge (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 74.

⁵¹ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 54.

⁵² Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 54-5.

would cease once the apostolic mission was accomplished and a local church established.⁵³ By contrast, Luther was more open in his view that spiritual gifts remain accessible to Christians today. This is demonstrated by his prescription of how a minister may perform healing of those afflicted by the devil, reflected in the well-known lyric of his great hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” which states, “The Spirit and the gifts are ours.”⁵⁴

Although it could be said that scholastic Protestantism substituted “an intellectual knowledge of doctrine for a knowledge of God by immediate revelation in, or to, the human heart,”⁵⁵ both Luther and Calvin did maintain belief in the inner witness of the Spirit. For Luther, the inner witness was primarily for the purpose of helping people understand Scripture, whereas Calvin saw the witness of the Spirit as enabling people to discern whether texts were the inspired Word of God.⁵⁶ Although cessationism was birthed during the Protestant Reformation, we see that there remained at least a flicker of the Spirit nurtured in the theology of both Luther and Calvin. In studying the theology of any religious leader, their continued development of thought should be considered. Luther, for instance, could be deemed a “developing, yet equivocating supernaturalist” if one considers the trajectory of his theological progression.⁵⁷ Sadly, these and other

⁵³ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 55.

⁵⁴ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 47-8.

⁵⁵ Ruthven, *What’s Wrong with Protestant Theology*, 3.

⁵⁶ Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* Volume I, 140.

⁵⁷ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 48. Clark is referencing the assessment of Paul King and Eddie Hyatt based on email interactions with King.

examples of openness to the Spirit by Luther and Calvin have been mostly forgotten and lost by the movements that they birthed.

In a striking critique, Jon Mark Ruthven sees Protestant theology as taking up the mantle of traditional human religion in that it emphasizes knowing information about God rather than knowing God.⁵⁸ When faith and discipleship primarily become an intellectual pursuit, there is little room for the work of the Spirit because supernatural experience is dependent upon humanity relying on guidance and provision that only God can provide. According to Ruthven:

Jesus, against traditional religion of all ages, faithfully follows the emphasis of the Bible, which is to promote the central mandate of mankind: to hear and heed God's voice and to imitate Jesus, who modeled this perfectly. . . . But following a characteristically human tendency to avoid God's voice, the Protestant tradition, following rabbinic Judaism explicitly, focused on an important but less-than-central issue—the exposition of Scripture—which resulted in de-emphasizing the central mission Scripture proclaims. This central mission is not only intimacy and communication with God but also acknowledging God's work prophetically and asserting His authority over the created order.⁵⁹

In an ironic twist, Protestant theology dismissed the witness of Scripture regarding the work of the Spirit to protect the authority of Scripture. As is all too common in reformation efforts, a needed reaction becomes an overreaction swinging the pendulum too far to the other side. Luther and Calvin's concern regarding perceived superstition and idolatry within the Catholic Church led to push-back against the supernatural altogether.⁶⁰ Equally concerning, the fear that miracles would validate false doctrines led to a Gospel proclamation devoid of the very signs of the kingdom

⁵⁸ Ruthven, *What's Wrong with Protestant Theology*, 1.

⁵⁹ Ruthven, *What's Wrong with Protestant Theology*, 2.

⁶⁰ Wouter J Hanegraaf, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 161-3.

implemented by Jesus. Such reactions by the Protestant Reformation threw out the baby with the bath and eventually led the Lutheran and Reformed traditions to embrace cessationism, a theological perspective more rigid than that of their founders.⁶¹

Meanwhile, Protestant theology regrettably maintained the Roman Catholic view on suffering and sickness as a means of participating in the sufferings of Jesus, as well as the predestinarian worldview inherited by Augustine.⁶² In doing so, the Western Church continued to move away from the understanding of the Spirit as expressed through Scripture, through the Early Church, and within cultures outside the Western world.

Cessationism

Thomas Aquinas, a renowned Catholic priest of the 13th century, laid the groundwork for cessationism by asserting that the primary purpose of miracles was to serve as a sign or testimony of truth. The wonders worked by Jesus and the disciples were deemed sufficient to prove the veracity of the faith for all time.⁶³ For those who espouse cessationism, the canon of Scripture has effectually replaced the work of the Spirit, even when that means undermining the message and direction of Scripture itself.

Cessationism views God as intentionally having closed the door on God's own willingness to perform signs and wonders. It is perplexing that many conservative and evangelical siblings in Christ who revere the words of Scripture appear to dismiss the

⁶¹ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 46-7.

⁶² Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 56.

⁶³ Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Post-Biblical Miracles*, Word & Spirit Press Monograph Series (Tulsa, OK: Word & Spirit Press, 2011), 21.

Apostle Paul's pronouncement that "the kingdom of God is not in words, but in power."⁶⁴

That entire segments of Christianity believe one can effectively proclaim the Gospel without accompanying signs and wonders is incongruous with the message of the New Testament, provoking the question, "Do we consider ourselves to be more capable of Gospel proclamation than our Master?"

In their motivation to protect the Christian canon from additions, proponents of cessationist theology have ironically created a second canon that deletes and denies the authority of numerous passages of Scripture to form a functional canon for a post-Apostolic age.⁶⁵ Jon Ruthven writes that in applying cessationist theology to Scripture, "traditional Protestantism succeeded in suppressing the central characteristic of the New Covenant from Scripture itself, namely, the ongoing and Biblically normative process of the revelation of God directly and immediately into the hearts of Believers."⁶⁶ One expression of this is that there is often an appreciation for God's general revelation through creation and nature, and yet skepticism and even resistance to God's self-revelation in more direct ways.

We see the dismissal of divine revelation beyond the written Word of God detailed in the opening paragraph of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Written in 1646 and reflecting Reformed theology, this document positions Scripture as the sole bearer of God's revelation in modern times:

It pleased the Lord . . . to reveal himself, and to declare that his will unto his Church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and

⁶⁴ 1 Corinthians 4:20, New American Standard Bible

⁶⁵ Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata*, xix-xx.

⁶⁶ Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata*, xx. Ruthven cites Acts 2:39, Isaiah 59:21, and Jeremiah 31:31-34 to support the validity of ongoing revelation.

for the more sure establishment and comfort of the Church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and the world, to commit the same wholly unto writing; which maketh the holy scripture to be most necessary; those former ways of God's revealing his will unto his people being now ceased.⁶⁷

The Confession's assertion that revelation is "wholly" committed to writing within Scripture and that the "former ways" of God's revelation are no longer in effect or available has significant implications for our understanding of Christian life and ministry. As divine revelation is key to many gifts and manifestations of the Spirit (including prophecy, discernment, words of knowledge, and tongues), our understanding of God's method of revelation is foundational to our theology of ministry and the Holy Spirit.

Another consequence of cessationism in local churches is that prayer is used as an agent of pastoral care rather than of healing power. Prayers for peace and comfort, or for God to work behind the scenes through the medical team, have replaced any expectation or authoritative command that an individual be healed in the name of Jesus.⁶⁸ Randy Clark writes that "clergy sometimes unintentionally began to pray for the ears of the sick to hear and be comforted more than for the ears of God to hear and act, to intervene and to respond not only with persevering strength but also preferably with the power to heal."⁶⁹

A more subtle form of cessationism is experienced when the spiritual gifts of Scripture are transmuted to reflect more ordinary expressions so that prophecy becomes

⁶⁷ John Macpherson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith: With Introduction and Notes*, 2nd ed., Handbooks for Bible Classes and Private Students (Edinburgh, UK: T. & T. Clark, 1881), 29.

⁶⁸ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 57.

⁶⁹ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 57.

preaching or teaching, and healing is interpreted metaphorically.⁷⁰ Ruthven reveals the convenience of this doctrine for the protection of institutional power:

Cessationism thusly provided the ecclesiastical hierarchy with a ready rationale against complaints of diminished charismatic activity in their churches and to an embarrassing implicit question, “how can religious authorities as bearers of pure Church tradition and praxis be justified if they lack certain charismata which appear to be a normative New Testament expression of Christian experience?” Perhaps the faithful recalled the prediction of 2 Tm. 3:5, of a church “having a form of religion but denying its δύνάμις [miracle] power.”⁷¹

William Howitt reflects a similar sentiment in detailing the reaction of Archbishop Cranmer and Bishop Latimer to challenges against the Church of England, which resulted in the Church of England moving from a general discomfort with the supernatural to an outright rejection of it:⁷²

Thus, these two great founders of the Reformed Church of England, because the Papists taunted them with having no miracles, and being therefore a mere heretical schism, instead of seeking to the Divine Founder of Christianity to confirm to them His favour of miraculous powers, adopted the convenient but deadly theory, that miracles had ceased.⁷³

In recalling a conversation with a pastor some years ago, he explained that his reason for going into ministry was that he was a gifted communicator. Conspicuously absent from his call narrative was any sense of divine calling or enduement with divine power for divine purpose. It is fair to ask whether the sidelining of the supernatural has led to clergy and laity alike who are more fit for humanitarian work than for kingdom work.

⁷⁰ Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata*, 19.

⁷¹ Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata*, 20.

⁷² Howitt, *The History of the Supernatural in All Ages and Nations*, 86.

⁷³ Howitt, *The History of the Supernatural in All Ages and Nations*, 91-2.

Cessationism is perhaps most often experienced as “soft cessationism,” in that while there is some openness to the belief that God could heal, there is little confidence that God would heal.⁷⁴ Soft cessationism focuses on God’s sovereignty so that God could heal if God so desired, but with little emphasis upon God’s promises to heal or on God’s character revealed as one who desires to heal. Between the scarcity of healings experienced in Western Christianity and the belief in God’s transcendent sovereignty (over God’s immanent benevolence), faithful disciples connect these dots to infer that God is unlikely and unwilling to heal. Yet even in church cultures that are hesitant or prohibitive regarding the supernatural, spiritual gifts operate without being overtly designated as such.⁷⁵ It seems that the Spirit finds a way to work within hungry, open hearts despite theological restrictions. In such cases, these gifts are likely to be attributed by onlookers to natural ability or human wisdom rather than to the glory of God.

Our lack of experience with supernatural phenomena within Western Christianity has become a self-perpetuating problem:

We don’t see God’s miraculous healing power because we don’t expect it. We don’t expect it, first, because we have not realized that it is God’s nature to heal. Secondly, we don’t expect it because we have not seen it, so we have to find a way to explain away the lack of miraculous power. We thus have a truncated theology of God’s nature.⁷⁶

In order to explain our lack of experience of the supernatural as normative for the Christian life, we build theological walls to guard against anything more. In defending our experience (or lack thereof), we reject God’s willingness to work in the world today.

⁷⁴ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 25.

⁷⁵ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 16.

⁷⁶ Paul L. King, foreword in *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams* by Randy Clark (Shippensburg, PA: Global Awakening, 2013), 12.

Additionally, there is a temptation to resist the works of God that we cannot explain or control. Richard Foster identifies the work of the Spirit as “an ongoing correction to our impulse to domesticate God. We have a perennial tendency to manage and control the world of the Spirit. We want a nice, tidy God.”⁷⁷

Cessationism and Liberalism: Surprising Bedfellows

The lack of expectancy for miracles in present-day Christianity comes from two primary sources on opposite ends of the theological spectrum. The first is cessationism, which we have already discussed. Cessationism is usually a fundamentalist or evangelical-leaning theological expression. The second source is theological liberalism, which reflects deistic-based rationalism and the belief that God is unwilling to violate the laws of nature.⁷⁸ The theological offspring of the Protestant Reformation (cessationism) and the Enlightenment (liberalism) stand united in their aversion to the supernatural, creating an unfortunate void in which counterfeit supernatural belief systems have arisen.⁷⁹

Cessationist fundamentalism and skeptical liberalism have become “strange bedfellows” in their understanding of the supernatural; consequently, pastors from both traditions fail to equip their congregations for the implementation or even expectation of supernatural ministry.⁸⁰ While cessationist-leaning branches of Christianity, whether

⁷⁷ Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 129.

⁷⁸ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 33.

⁷⁹ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 16-7.

⁸⁰ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 32-3.

fundamentalist or evangelical, may see the Word of God as a replacement for the supernatural work of God, we also find that liberal branches of Christianity have implemented humanity's work for justice as a replacement for the supernatural work of God. It is crucial to uphold the importance of both the authority of Scripture and works of justice, yet it is also incumbent upon Christians of all stripes to question whether our primary emphasis (studying the Word or doing justice) is dependent upon human wisdom and work, or upon divine wisdom and work. If we can accomplish the Christian task and live a Christian witness through our own effort, we have rejected supernatural ministry.

Returning to the influence of liberalism, this product of Enlightenment Rationalism resists the possibility that God would violate natural laws. Liberal teaching and preaching present healing narratives with a moral or spiritual application rather than as evidence that God is willing to perform miracles today. Supernatural stories are treated more as myths and legends than as historical accounts of God's provision and faithfulness.⁸¹ David F. Watson writes that "if your approach to the gospels presupposes that miracles such as healings are impossible, then you cannot but conclude that these stories are mythical. If you presuppose that no one, under any circumstances, can rise from the dead, then it will be impossible to conclude that Jesus rose from the dead."⁸²

While the thoughtful teacher or preacher will embrace the scholarly study of Scripture, which includes identifying the literary genre of the text, they need not dismiss that which biblical authors meant to be taken literally. The writers of the New Testament intend that we view the incarnation, resurrection, and miracles of Christ as literal,

⁸¹ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 28.

⁸² David F. Watson, "The Church is Scripture's True Home," *Firebrand Magazine*, December 6, 2022, <https://firebrandmag.com/articles/the-church-is-scriptures-true-home>.

historical happenings. Yet, liberal theology is prone to spiritualize these events to the point that historical significance is lost or denied.⁸³ Unlike cessationism, which is skeptical of modern-day supernatural events, liberalism is skeptical of the supernatural throughout the entirety of Scripture.

Many faithful church members are unaware that Western biblical scholarship often operates from an inherent bias against supernatural phenomena. While scholars typically see themselves as challengers of the status quo, the greatest challenge to the status quo of academia would be the serious study of the supernatural phenomena.⁸⁴ According to Craig S. Keener, “some sociologists whose field studies noted extensive claims of miracles, many from purported eyewitnesses, warn that their research might feel threatening to Western scholars ‘who live out their existence within the shelter of the academy...’”⁸⁵ What does it say when sociologists have to provide trigger warnings for Western readers before recounting eyewitness testimonies?

Although this paper has focused primarily on the influence of Western theology upon supernatural ministry, the majority of Christians today live within the Global South, also known as the Majority World.⁸⁶ Keener writes, “Whereas fewer than 18% of Christians in 1900 lived outside Europe and North America, today more than 60% do, and an estimated 70% will by 2025.”⁸⁷ While there is relatively little emphasis on

⁸³ Clark, *The Healing River and Its Contributing Streams*, 29.

⁸⁴ Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts: Volume 1 and Volume 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 138-9.

⁸⁵ Keener, *Miracles*, 113.

⁸⁶ Keener, *Miracles*, 86.

⁸⁷ Keener, *Miracles*, 214.

miracles within the Western world, signs and wonders are a primary draw for those in the Majority World, especially healing and deliverance.⁸⁸ According to some surveys, 90% of newly converted Christians in China report that healing played a role in bringing them to Christ.⁸⁹

Further, the tide may be turning regarding openness to supernatural causation in the West. The relativism and subjectivism of our postmodern world, which is often problematic in teaching Christian doctrine as objective truth, may very well bring a new openness to divine activity. Keener explains:

True relativism must allow for the possibility of the supernatural. Scholars now recognize the limitations of the Enlightenment claims to pure objectivity in historiography; writers' perspectives inform their ways of sorting the data. In the wake of postmodernity in the West, the collapse of traditional Western paradigms has led to the reevaluation of a number of long-held interpretations of reality. Other disciplines have been through paradigm shifts; some argue that such a shift is needed in ours as well. . . . Readers in many cultures, perhaps especially those least trained in Western paradigms, approach early Christian reports of signs not as problems but as a model of ministry. I suspect that this wider, global Christian reading is closer to that of the early Christian authors' ideal audience than our usual Western approach is.⁹⁰

The privileged status of Western assumptions may be crumbling with the arrival of postmodernity.⁹¹ Come, Lord Jesus!

⁸⁸ Hwa Yung, "The Integrity of Mission in the Light of the Gospel: Bearing the Witness of the Spirit," *Mission Studies* 24, no. 2 (2007): 3-4, https://missionstudies.org/archive/conference/2proceedings/Keynote_Address_HWA_Yung.pdf

⁸⁹ Edmond Tang and Allan Anderson, *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, Second Edition (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2011), 391.

⁹⁰ Keener, *Miracles*, 135.

⁹¹ Keener, *Miracles*, 216.

Conclusion

The attempt of modern-day disciples to reap the results promised by Jesus while abandoning the tools and methodology provided through supernatural ministry has led to disappointment and decline. The harvest is plentiful, but today's ill-equipped workers are frustrated and apathetic from attempting to commence harvesting without the power of the Harvester.

Through influences from without and within, Western branches of Christianity have lost their vital expression of the Holy Spirit. This work has sought to identify and unpack theological movements within Western Christianity that have systematically rejected the work of the Holy Spirit. By retracing these movements and acknowledging their impacts, we may effectively unlearn the anti-supernatural theology that we have been taught and absorbed for centuries. We can also delve into the witness of Scripture, the Early Church, and the Majority World to discover anew the joy of life and ministry in the Spirit. While the strength of our theological inheritance within Western Christianity affords both evangelical passion and social conscience, the suppression of supernatural experience remains a serious barrier to fulfilling harvest ministry today. May God call us as spiritual reformers of this era so that we may restore that which has been lost.

In this effort at restoration through reformation of the supernatural, however, it is important to focus on moving forward rather than becoming fixated on what has gone before. William Howitt presents a compelling depiction of the Protestant Reformation's response to what he refers to as the Catholic Church's "shameless traffic in miracles." Howitt described the reformers as being determined to clean up the Lord's field, overrun with tares of poor theology growing along with the wheat:

They forgot to consult the Lord's recommendation so conspicuously given in the Gospel, to let the tares grow with the wheat till the final harvest, lest they should pull up the wheat along with them. To get rid of false miracles, they plucked up the true; and to prevent the return of the false, they determined to root up the very principle of faith in the miraculous, in spite of the whole world, with its five thousand five hundred years of miraculous facts, protesting against so insane a rejection of its laws. In spite of the plain words of Christ and His apostles, that miracle was the patrimony of the Christian church; and that the mark of the true disciple should be that 'these signs should follow them that believe.'⁹²

May our present-day reform efforts not be misplaced so that we are more focused on cleaning up the Lord's field than on rolling up our sleeves to enter the harvest. The fruit of the harvest is not based on our ability to convict, convince, or reprimand other workers. Rather, we're invited to enter the Lord's field with the Spirit's tools to reap the bountiful harvest. As we partake in supernatural ministry, the Holy Spirit will lead us into the harvest to participate in God's divine action for God's divine purpose. If we are to have a new reformation, may it be a reformation of the Spirit.

⁹² Howitt, *The History of the Supernatural in All Ages and Nations*, 67.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the impact of the Reformation and other movements on Christian theology is rivaled by that of the Enlightenment and its epistemological ripples. Significant cultural forces have diverted Christian ministry from the supernatural DNA that was modeled by Christ and implemented within the Early Church. To effectively train Jesus' followers for ministry, a process of unlearning and learning must be further explored to discover the influence of rationalist epistemology upon Christian faith and practice. Once our assumed philosophical systems of attaining knowledge are revealed, we begin to untangle and sort out the confusion that pervades the Western Church today. In discerning the source of our belief (and disbelief), we may reevaluate our understanding and expectation of the Holy Spirit, as well as what should be considered normative within Christian ministry. It is expected that followers of Jesus will be liberated to participate in the supernatural ministry of Christ once epistemological barriers are isolated and moved aside.

The tendency to question whether supernatural phenomena may be appropriately experienced within the mainline Church today reveals the continued influence of Enlightenment thinking by which spiritual and supernatural realities are deemed irrational

and prescientific.¹ We will therefore delve into the theory of knowledge, or epistemology, which is one of the oldest branches of philosophy. The search for knowledge is featured prominently in the earliest story of the Judeo-Christian faith, in which the inaugural human couple described in Genesis 3 chooses to eat from the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and evil, immediately suffering the consequences of their decision.² This pivotal story became foundational to the Augustinian doctrine of the “The Fall” of humanity, though the concept of fallen man was later dismissed by Enlightenment thinking altogether.³

Moving from the Old Testament to the New, the Roman governor Pontius Pilate speaks for all humanity during his encounter with Jesus, posing a question that has echoed through the centuries: “What is truth?”⁴ Epistemology, however, takes a step back from the question of what is true to consider how knowledge is attained, with the expectation that putting the right systems in place will lead to greater knowledge. Enlightenment epistemology considers fact to be the equivalent of truth, with rational human beings serving as the judge of what is deemed factual.⁵ Epistemology rooted in rationalism puts humanity in the driver’s seat in that we make the rules for how one may

¹ Henning Wrogemann, *Intercultural Theology: Intercultural Hermeneutics* (Missiological Engagements), Translated by Karl E. Bohmer (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016), 7-8.

² The first consequence was that the man and woman recognized they were naked. They became afraid of God and soon turned to blame and accusation as a method of self-preservation. The man, woman, serpent, and even the ground of the earth were cursed because of the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Death became part of the natural order, and the couple was cast out of the Garden.

³ Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age*, Numen Book Series. Studies in the History of Religions, V. 90 (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2004), 4.

⁴ John 18:38.

⁵ Peter Bellini, *Participation: An Onto-Epistemology for a Theology of Mission for the 21st Century* (Lexington, KY: Emeth Press, 2010), 20.

identify and confirm that which is factual. In this view, knowledge is not a reality to be revealed but rather an object to be discovered and conquered. Much like the fruit of the forbidden tree, knowledge can be taken.

Enlightenment rationalism instigated a move from focusing primarily upon ontology to epistemology.⁶ Being was replaced by knowing to the point that being was defined by knowing. As Descartes proclaimed, *Cogito ergo sum*, or “I think therefore I am.”⁷ Peter Bellini clarifies the implications of this paradigm shift in that “we move away from the reality of God to how certain we are of our knowledge of God, and then to ‘how do we know that we know,’ and how efficiently can we ‘prove’ this knowledge.”⁸ It is no wonder that our discipleship programs have become intellectual pursuits rather than practical training for incarnational ministry.

Our framework for how knowledge is discerned and verified will directly affect our expectation of what role, if any, the supernatural realm plays in the pursuit of knowledge. While humanity has held to both natural and supernatural causation to varying degrees throughout the ages, consideration of transcendent influences has been largely abandoned with increased access to education and technology.⁹ While this could lead one to the assumption that supernatural belief is for the uneducated or naïve, it should be acknowledged that educational systems steeped in rationalism would naturally guide students to accept the values and implicit epistemology of those who serve as their

⁶ Bellini, *Participation*, 28.

⁷ Bellini, *Participation*, 29.

⁸ Bellini, *Participation*, 28.

⁹ Rachel E. Watson-Jones, Justin T. A. Busch, and Cristine H. Legare, “Interdisciplinary and Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Explanatory Coexistence,” *Topics in Cognitive Science* 7, no. 4 (2015): 611-23.

teachers and authority figures. The all-important filter that should be applied to any process of learning is the consideration of inherent bias or prejudice naturally ingrained within that educational system due to cultural and ideological influences. Perhaps the greatest expression of naiveté is the assumption that education is somehow above or free of ideology and dogma. Educational systems, like religious, political, and family systems, exist and are influenced by a unique worldview.

One may ask how the childlike faith esteemed by Jesus fits within our educated, enlightened culture. The account of Jesus blessing children in Matt. 19:14-15 is a favorite Scripture passage for many Christians. In this narrative, Jesus not only blesses but honors children who have been deemed unworthy of his attention, presenting them as heirs of the kingdom of heaven. While this story could be misused to defend or glorify ignorance and intellectual laziness, Jesus appears to point beyond educational attainment and academic ability. Perhaps it is the openness, humility, and (to return to a recurring theme of this paper) vulnerability demonstrated by children that Jesus celebrates and elevates. If the kingdom of heaven belongs to those who are like children, our priorities need to be reordered and our assumptions questioned.

Even as Jesus' elevation of the value of children in the kingdom of God was counter-cultural at the time, his words challenge our epistemology and pursuit of knowledge today. As Bellini observes, the past 500 years have been preoccupied with "getting our head screwed on straight before our heart can understand properly," which presents a contradictory priority to that of the Gospel of Christ.¹⁰ While God has given us minds capable of marvelous things, our rational abilities must be dethroned and take on

¹⁰ Bellini, *Participation*, 8.

the role of a servant rather than that of master. This is especially important for Christians immersed in Western culture to the point of not knowing where Western culture and epistemology end and where Christian faith begins. If our epistemology is not informed and motivated by our faith, we are out of order. This chapter's task is to study the significance of epistemology in shaping our belief system regarding the validity and availability of the supernatural.

Epistemological Considerations

Challenges to Epistemology

Epistemology is the framework by which we build our beliefs and assumptions; these beliefs become the motivating factor for our actions. When actions are revealed to be problematic, we must work backward to consider how our epistemological system has shaped our actions. For followers of Jesus, it is crucial that we first assess whether our epistemology aligns with the Gospel of Christ. We then evaluate whether this framework bears the fruit of that Gospel.

Bellini speaks to “the enthroning of autonomous reason as an empire over ‘lesser’ forms of knowledge.”¹¹ These supposed lesser forms could include that which is gleaned by intuition, experience, or divine revelation. It is especially concerning that some epistemologies devalue knowledge attributed to persons deemed to be lesser. When epistemological judgments decide which voices are heard and which are silenced, there is potential for great harm. The Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and the practice of

¹¹ Bellini, *Participation*, 8.

slavery serve as egregious examples of what can happen when people groups are dismissed, subjugated, and disempowered from contributing to the cultural conversation of what is true and just.

Those in positions of power to analyze truth claims may do so in such a paternalistic manner that entire people groups are perceived to be intellectually or socially inferior. Bellini identifies this dangerous and self-serving tendency as a centering of the source of truth within one's own individualistic, self-referenced point of view:

Philosophers such as Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984) have also emphasized the role that modern epistemology has played in exploitation, power and control. Rationalism becomes a tool crafted by a people group for its own purposes at the expense of another group that is considered to be less than rational and less valuable. The Cartesian *Cogito*, "I think therefore I am," creates an ontological, individualized space that is defined by a thinking subject, and a thinking subject defines all ontological space. Autonomous reason, reason detached from ontological participation in God or anything transcendent, plays God, and makes the rules."¹²

Drawing from the work of David Bosch, Bellini further points to the Enlightenment presumption that it is the responsibility of the "civilized" to "conquer and civilize the 'uncivilized'" out of a sense of intrinsic superiority.¹³ An especially grievous example of this triumphalist mindset is the doctrine of *tabula rasa*, which presumes that mission must start with a clean slate; anything which does not originate from Western culture is deemed to be incompatible with Christian belief.¹⁴ The propensity to baptize the entirety of Western culture as Christian while judging other cultures wholesale brings to mind Jesus' sobering question, "Why do you see the speck in your neighbor's eye, but

¹² Bellini, *Participation*, 17.

¹³ Bellini, *Participation*, 20. Bellini draws from the work of David Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 305, 312.

¹⁴ Bellini, *Participation*, 21.

do not notice the log in your own eye?" (Matt. 7:3). Such cultural bias and arrogance demonstrate a fundamental danger of epistemology in that any system of gaining knowledge may be tainted by one's culture, motives, and experience. However, due to the Enlightenment premise that the human mind is untouched by the world it surveys, that which is studied becomes an object to be analyzed and monopolized.¹⁵ This potential for objectification of cultures and people groups should immediately raise red flags for students of history.

Lesslie Newbigin, 20th century theologian and missiologist, describes the Enlightenment as accompanied by the "conviction that Europeans now knew the secret of knowledge and therefore the secret of mastery over the world."¹⁶ The saying that "knowledge is power" carries darker implications than are usually intended.¹⁷ Walter Brueggemann speaks to the power dynamic inherent in epistemology, pointedly critiquing academia's inability to hear the marginalized in matters pertaining to supernatural phenomena:

Preference for "fact" is a claim characteristically made by those with power to legitimate their own reading of reality; "miracle" most often comes to us on the attestation of those who lack social power to legitimate in conventional ways their claims, and who engage in hope and imagination which are incongruous with the realities of established power. That is, "fact" and "miracle" do not concern simply *modes of knowledge* but also the legitimating claims and assumptions that authorize alternative *modes of power*. The attraction of "fact" in our modern

¹⁵ Bellini, *Participation*, 29. Bellini is referencing Bosh's discussion of the *subject-object scheme*. See page 264 of *Transforming Mission*. This objectification of receptor cultures was appallingly adopted by Western Christian missional theology.

¹⁶ Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks: The Gospel and Western Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 19.

¹⁷ This popular quote is attributed to Francis Bacon. "Knowledge is power," In *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, Houghton Mifflin, by E. D. Hirsch, Joseph F. Kett, and James S. Trefil. 3rd ed. Houghton Mifflin, 2002.
https://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/hmndcl/knowledge_is_power/0?institutionId=8909

reconstructions of the past seems to tilt the historical process toward established *power* rather than *wonder*, so that the reliable material for history is material that is allied with established power.¹⁸

The practice of epistemology has been accused of being intrinsically masculinist, a boys' club of sorts. Postmodern feminists have dared to ask, "Who needs epistemology anyway?"¹⁹ Due to the inherent bias in epistemological assumptions, that which is deemed as knowledge one day may be revealed to be ideology the next.²⁰ Consideration needs to be given not only to our methods for attaining knowledge but also to which people groups have voice in creating epistemological structures. Each new era must return to the question of who is invited to the epistemological table and who has been excluded.

As was discussed previously, Western scholarship operates from a stance of bias against the supernatural.²¹ Further, the philosophical framework from which rationalistic scholarship springs is biased against disempowered people groups. Notably, today's Majority World is often referred to as the Third World, carrying connotations of ignorance, weakness, and helplessness. When the privileged establishment writes the rules regarding whose voice is authoritative and whose reason is sound, it should not be surprising that the views and values of the disempowered are judged to be less than trustworthy. Further, given that the supernatural is experienced to a greater degree among

¹⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment: Psalms, Modernity, and the Making of History*. Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 39.

¹⁹ Gregor McLennan, "Feminism, Epistemology and Postmodernism: Reflections on Current Ambivalence," *Sociology* 29, no. 3 (1995), 391.

²⁰ McLennan, "Feminism, Epistemology and Postmodernism," 394.

²¹ Craig S. Keener, *Miracles: The Credibility of the New Testament Accounts: Volume 1 and Volume 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 138-9.

the poor and the vulnerable, it would be conceivable for those who do not share in these experiences to leverage their power to invalidate such reports. In such cases, reason becomes a weapon to tear down foreign or novel experiences rather than a tool for building a framework of understanding that takes diverse voices and experiences seriously.

Another motivation for the rejection of supernatural phenomena may be the attempt to protect human authority structures.²² Experience of the supernatural upsets the apple cart of order and established hierarchy both within modern culture and within the Church. In modern culture, the supernatural challenges the status of the scientific method as the only appropriate and effective methodology for gleaning truth. Within the Church, the supernatural decentralizes authority structures, as laypersons may operate in greater supernatural power than those licensed or ordained by the institutional Church. For instance, the gift of speaking in tongues, or glossolalia, gives a strong voice to uneducated and illiterate persons during corporate worship.²³ The supernatural challenges our anthropocentric systems of knowing, our identity rooted in pride, and our attempt to keep everyone and everything in place. In such cases, epistemology may be used as a guardrail against new levels of knowledge.

²² S.E. Ackerman, "The Language of Religious Innovation: Spirit Possession and Exorcism in a Malaysian Catholic Pentecostal Movement," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 37, no 1, 1981.

²³ Skip Jenkins, *A Spirit Christology*, Ecumenical Studies, Vol. 3. (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2018), 1.

The Enlightenment

With this understanding of the dangers and vulnerabilities of the epistemological endeavor, we will continue with a brief survey of the Enlightenment and its impression on epistemology. The term “enlightenment” takes on a vastly different tone depending on the context. Within the East, enlightenment refers to the achievement of spiritual or religious insight, whereas, in the West, it primarily focuses on the attainment of knowledge.²⁴ To Western ears, the most familiar understanding is linked with the philosophical movement of the 18th century, referred to as the Enlightenment or Age of Reason.²⁵ While it may be tempting to present Enlightenment thinking in simplistic terms, Paul Avis challenges the notion of the “age of reason” as a monolith culture:

For all the constant invocation of reason, the Enlightenment was also an age of credulity, superstition, interest in the occult, alchemy, quack remedies and masonic mythology. The Enlightenment was the opposite of intellectually monochrome. It included Diderot’s penchant for the gothic and the macabre; Hume’s insistence that passion will trump reason every time – his undermining of the authority of reason in philosophy and theology; Rousseau’s intense, deliberately cultivated subjectivity and attack on the *philosophes*’ doctrinaire rationalism . . . All these aspects are intimations of Romanticism, deep within the Enlightenment.”²⁶

Despite the varied philosophical landscape of this era, Avis goes on to summarize the Enlightenment as an age of questioning, criticism, and a revolt against authoritarian

²⁴ A. Pablo Iannone, *Dictionary of World Philosophy* s.v. “Enlightenment” (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001). Credo Reference:
<https://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/title/routwp?institutionId=8909>

²⁵ *The Macmillan Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. s.v. “Enlightenment (or Age of Reason)” (Market House Books Ltd, 2003). The Macmillan Encyclopedia | The Macmillan Encyclopedia - Credo Reference (oclc.org)

²⁶ Paul Avis, *In Search of Authority: Anglican Theological Method from the Reformation to the Enlightenment* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 240.

dogma.²⁷ For Enlightenment thinkers, reason is disconnected from the mind of God, instead focusing on human potential to study the world without the aid of divine revelation or intervention.²⁸

Although the Enlightenment is typically characterized as anti-Christian, the movement was more nuanced.²⁹ The emphasis of the moderate mainstream was of toleration, purification, and rationalization, but their attempts to discredit false miracles, superstition, and excessive ecclesiastical authority appeared to put moderates of the Enlightenment in the same camp as more radical thinkers.³⁰ Although there was notable anti-religious sentiment in France and a newfound openness to free-thinking and atheism, hostility towards religion was primarily focused as a reaction against extremes and abuses within Roman Catholicism and Calvinism rather than on religious belief as a whole.³¹ For example, the Roman Catholic French philosopher René Descartes proposed a two-substance dualism of mind and body which provided a sanctuary of sorts for supernatural beliefs in angels, demons, and miracles within his own logical system, and empiricists Robert Boyle and John Locke were also open to supernatural mysteries.³²

The more mainstream representatives of the Enlightenment rarely applied their epistemological criteria across the board, as many sought a balanced approach that would

²⁷ Avis, *In Search of Authority*, 243.

²⁸ Avis, *In Search of Authority*, 243.

²⁹ Avis, *In Search of Authority*, 254.

³⁰ Jonathan Israel, *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity, and the Emancipation of Man, 1670-1752* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 94. This movement was confused with Deism and Spinozism, philosophies that understand God as absent or noninterfering within the universe.

³¹ Avis, *In Search of Authority*, 255.

³² Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 10.

not completely pull the rug out from under religious beliefs.³³ However, according to Jonathan Israel, the majority Enlightenment could not withstand the rigidly rational challenges of the Radical Enlightenment, which pointed out every appearance of contradiction:³⁴

The radical wing who scorned all such dualistic systems, and attempts at adjustment, may have been a tiny fringe in terms of numbers, status, and approval ratings, among both elites and in popular culture, but they proved impossible to dislodge or overwhelm intellectually. Those who reduced the worldly and spiritual to a single continuum and erected a single set of rules governing the whole of reality . . . were everywhere denounced, banned, and reviled. Yet the universal opposition of churches, governments, universities, and leading publicists, as well as the great bulk of the common people, could not alter the fact that it was precisely these philosophical radicals extending the Galilean-Cartesian conception of rationality, and criterion of what is ‘true’, across the board, pushing it as far as it would go, and allowing no exemptions whatsoever, who often seemed to evince the greatest intellectual consistency and coherence.³⁵

Perhaps this is yet another example of fundamentalism triumphing over more thoughtful, nuanced value systems. The Radical Enlightenment, though initially a rejected and persecuted system of thought, persisted until it at last infiltrated popular opinion.³⁶

The Enlightenment’s suspicion, distrust of authority, and rejection of inherited orthodoxy “born of bitter experience of the impediments to enquiry erected by the Roman Catholic Church” present similarities with the postmodern deconstructionism occurring in the Western Church today.³⁷ While it is tempting to lay the blame at the feet of the

³³ Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 10-1.

³⁴ Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 11-2.

³⁵ Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 11-2.

³⁶ Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 12.

³⁷ Avis, *In Search of Authority*, 244.

Enlightenment, it is rare to find a true antagonist in our study of history. Instead, we see constant chain reactions as one movement leads to the next.

In considering reactionary movements like the Enlightenment, the Protestant Reformation, and today's Postmodernism, the Church must take some responsibility. The third law of physics proposed by Enlightenment thinker Sir Isaac Newton sheds light on the cultural movement of which he was a part: "For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction."³⁸ Culture, like physical matter, is highly reactionary. Therefore, while the Enlightenment left an indelible mark upon faith, science, and Western culture, it was also created by numerous layers and cultural forces, sowing seeds that would lead to subsequent movements.

Western thought now has two dominant and sometimes warring epistemological systems, and the deconstruction occurring within many branches of the Church today bear witness to this reality. While Enlightenment thinking remains ingrained within much of Western thought, Postmodernism is influencing our culture with equal force.

Postmodernism, also a Western phenomenon, originated in the 1960s and became part of mainstream thinking, especially within academic circles.³⁹ Postmodernism's "romanticist rejection of reason," as well as the growing sense of "Western guilt" that identifies the more horrific chapters in our history as consequences of Enlightenment imperialistic

³⁸ E.D. Hirsch, Joseph F. Kett, and James S. Trefil, *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, Houghton Mifflin, 3rd ed. s.v. "Newton's Laws of Motion." https://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/hmndcl/newton_s_laws_of_motion/0?institutionId=8909

³⁹ Marcel Kuntz, "Science and Postmodernism: From Right-Thinking to Soft-Despotism." *Trends in Biotechnology* 35, no. 4 (2017), 283.

thought, signals a major cultural shift in the West.⁴⁰ This changing of the philosophical guard calls for careful and prayerful consideration as the Church discerns how to faithfully transfer the unchanging truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ from a modern to postmodern culture.

The Enlightenment Impact Upon Christianity

Despite these considerations, the persistence of the Enlightenment's impact upon Christianity is undeniable. Olav Hammer describes the widespread influence of Enlightenment epistemology in unexpected corners of Western religion:

Any post-Enlightenment religion in the West will be directly or indirectly marked by the Enlightenment project. In this sense, even the staunchest fundamentalists are truly modern. Christian inerrantists regard the Bible as factual in every respect, in conscious opposition to the majority view. Their principal spokespersons will, when necessary, attempt to support their positions by arguing from the same basis of historical scholarship and rational debate as their liberal critics. They may argue that the resurrection actually occurred, not only because the Bible says so, but also because there are purportedly rational reasons for holding such a belief.⁴¹

The fingerprints of the Enlightenment are seen in evangelical Christianity's emphasis upon apologetics, which may explain why our carefully reasoned arguments to prove the validity of the Gospel are ineffective with younger postmodern individuals. One of the more popular methods of evangelism is the "Roman Road," whereby the evangelist attempts to walk people through numerous verses in the New Testament book of Romans in order to explain the road to salvation. The idea is that if people can just

⁴⁰ Kuntz, "Science and Postmodernism," 283.

⁴¹ Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge*, 4.

think correctly, faith will follow. Such rationally based scripts are no longer effective measures for faith sharing.

As Christianity continues to reflect and react to Enlightenment epistemology by opting for ministry models based on rationalism, we are failing to engage the mission field in which we are planted. Newbigin challenges this culture-bound practice of ministry by asking, “As people who are part of modern Western culture, with its confidence in the validity of its scientific methods, how can we move from the place where we explain the gospel in terms of our modern scientific world-view to the place where we explain our modern scientific world-view from the point of view of the gospel?”⁴² Whereas rationalism got the question backward, Newbigin flips the script of our epistemological process by reestablishing the primacy of the Gospel in faith and practice.

A Dialectic Challenge to Epistemological Assumptions

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel deemed humanity to be incapable of stepping outside our own time period to perceive ourselves and the world in which we live objectively.⁴³ Though Hegel did not specifically use the term, his view has been associated with the concept of the *zeitgeist*, an overarching “spirit of the age.”⁴⁴ Hegel’s dialectic framework is part of a greater movement or “progressive ascent to knowledge of the whole” by means of dueling or contradictory concepts that reveal the vulnerabilities

⁴² Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 18.

⁴³ Glenn Alexander Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, Continuum Philosophy Dictionaries (London, UK: Continuum, 2010), 262.

⁴⁴ Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, 262.

of the other until another concept reconciles or transcends them.⁴⁵ The dialectic process eventually results in a synthesis of the two ideas in alignment with the spirit of the age.

If Hegel's concept is true, then persons and parties with contradictory viewpoints may believe that they stand opposite one another without realizing they are both being pulled towards a predetermined path guided by the *zeitgeist*. This deterministic philosophy would cast a shadow over the assumption that we are objective free thinkers. In contradiction to Enlightenment thinking, Hegel's philosophy may be interpreted as positioning humanity as subjects, rather than masters, of culture. Epistemological constructs, therefore, would not be seen as infallible but rather as a temporary reflection of one's culture. Reason is interpretative by nature, and the work of judging truth cannot escape its own subjectivism. The most irresponsible thinker, therefore, is one who believes they are truly unbiased and objective.

As we carry the confidence and hubris of the Enlightenment into the fluidity and subjectivism of Postmodernism, it is difficult to discern what is true and how truth can be discerned. Of course, the mixing and matching of epistemological methods and conclusions is nothing new. For those within the general population or "common people" of the Enlightenment, belief systems were created more as a patchwork quilt than as one cohesive system of knowing; this maintained respect for authority, as well as beliefs in a supernatural realm alongside emerging philosophies and belief systems.⁴⁶ The postmodern thought and deconstructionism experienced within the Church today reflect

⁴⁵ Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary*, 72-3.

⁴⁶ Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 10.

this phenomenon of “multiple choice” belief systems. This calls for an epistemology that can be heard and engaged by our culture today.

Worshipping the Source

Even with various nuances of the Enlightenment and some enduring support of religious beliefs, it remains that the Enlightenment triggered widespread rejection of the supernatural within the Western world. Drawing upon religious language to describe the cultural shift at the dawning of the Enlightenment, Newbigin refers to the embrace of Enlightenment ideology as a collective conversion, “We were blind, now we see.”⁴⁷ Continuing this religious motif, Newbigin points to the scientist as the new priest of this naturalistic belief system:

There is no place for miracles or divine intervention in providence as categories of explanation. God may be conceived, as in eighteenth-century Deism, as the ultimate author of it all, but one does not need to know the author personally in order to read the book. Nature—the sum total of what exists—is the really real. And the scientist is the priest who can unlock for us the secrets of nature and give us the practical mastery of its workings.⁴⁸

The scientist became the new authority figure as naturalism and rationalism edged out supernaturalism and traditional religious beliefs. Enlightenment thinking, especially as expressed by scientism, offered an exchange of one dogma for another, a religion of faith for a religion of rationalism. Perhaps we truly are wired for worship, for even our rejection of religion takes on a religious tone. Brad S. Gregory points to the devotion of academics to rationalism as rivaling the dogma found in religious belief:

⁴⁷ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 19.

⁴⁸ Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 20.

The belief that miracles are impossible in principle seems natural, normal, obvious, undeniable—rather like religious beliefs in close-knit, traditional societies. The conviction has an aura of neutrality and objectivity, as if dogmatic metaphysical naturalism were somehow not as much a personal conviction as is dogmatic religion, as if rejection of the very possibility of transcendent reality were the default position, one obvious to any intelligent person.⁴⁹

Given that truth is beautiful and transformative, perhaps human beings are programmed to worship the source of truth. Without revelation from above, humanity serves as the wellspring and judge of truth by process of elimination. Though worship of ourselves as the source of truth may be unrealized and accidental, the claiming of human objectivity and rationality is a grasping for divine status, nonetheless. Through God's gracious self-revelation, however, humanity may become aware of a more extraordinary mind above the human mind. Hans Urs von Balthasar explains it in this way:

The essence of Christianity and its truth . . . is realized whenever a man becomes aware of the existence of Christ as the Word or the Father in such a way that he will fall down and adore...a glimpse of the Absolute . . . At this moment the utterly free self-revelation of God in Christ meets man's utterly free decision to open and surrender himself to truth, though this has been made by human freedom under the influence of divine revelation.⁵⁰

However, without the gracious self-revelation of God and the willing surrender of human beings to this reality, confusion will remain as to the source of truth and the proper focus of worship. Descartes pioneered a system meant to ensure that humans could avoid falling into error, but Newbigin suggests that even this is an act of faith, countering it with the challenge that perhaps humanity is not meant to avoid taking

⁴⁹ Brad S. Gregory, "The Other Confessional History: On Secular Bias in the Study of Religion," *History and Theory* 45, no. 4 (2006), 138.

⁵⁰ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The God Question and Modern Man*, A Seabury Paperback (New York, NY: Seabury Press, 1967), 2.

risks.⁵¹ Could it be that the vulnerability of Christian discipleship, as discussed previously related to Matthew 10, should also be applied to our pursuit of truth? If we are willing to be formed by faith and reason, we will be challenged, stretched, and transformed. However, the desire to protect, control, and dominate has caused the religious and irreligious alike to abuse both religion and science in pursuit of personal comfort and power.

Mercy Amba Oduyoye speaks to prior mission work in Africa as an “arm of colonialism,” duplicating the culture of Latin countries in the West.⁵² She writes, “The Spirit is a gift poured on all who believe in Christ. But then it seemed the age of the Spirit’s work of leading into truth was over; only the established church had the truth.”⁵³ Throughout the history of the Church, the reign and role of the Holy Spirit have been co-opted by various theological beliefs as well as for purposes of expediency and power, at which time religious leaders step in to take over. Oduyoye further explains that while the missionaries preached an egalitarian message of Jesus as an elder brother, “the converts were younger and less capable; the missionaries had to think for them.”⁵⁴ When the Church ceases to lead people to Jesus and instead interprets Jesus for the people, the institution has positioned itself as the source of truth, thus erecting a barricade to the true Source.

⁵¹ Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), 28.

⁵² Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing: Theological Reflections on Christianity in Africa* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 41.

⁵³ Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 41-2.

⁵⁴ Oduyoye, *Hearing and Knowing*, 42.

Evolutionary Expectations

Steven Mithen expresses surprise that humanity's focus on worshipping gods and spirits is so pervasive across time and culture and, even more so, that it does not seem to have resulted in a natural selection preferring those who focused on practical work over spiritual pursuits.⁵⁵ Mithen's comment reflects a common assumption that ancient peoples were ignorant or intellectually compromised by the time in which they lived. Given that magi were guided by stars to find the Christ child over two thousand years ago while people today often rely on GPS, such modern arrogance seems unfounded.

The abandonment of the supernatural may be perceived by some as a natural evolution of human development, as illustrated by Thomas J. Csordas' anthropological discussion of uprightness as a sign of human evolution contrary to spiritual postures, such as kneeling in prayer and lying prone under the influence of the Spirit.⁵⁶ While supernatural experiences may initially appear to cause a reversal of that which has been attained through human evolution, such occurrences reflect an act of humility and vulnerability rather than a reversal of evolutionary gains.⁵⁷

The contribution of Friedrich Schleiermacher is helpful here in that he focuses on the intuitive experience of that which is transcendent over and above intellectual or moral

⁵⁵ Steven Mithen, "Symbolism and the Supernatural," in *The Evolution of Culture: An Interdisciplinary View* (Edinburgh, UK: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 149.

⁵⁶ Thomas J. Csordas, *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 228-9. Being "slain in the Spirit" or "resting in the Spirit" occurs when a person is overwhelmed with the presence of the Holy Spirit to the point that they "fall out" or lie down to soak in the presence of God.

⁵⁷ The author would suggest that the ability and willingness to take on a posture of vulnerability demonstrates human advancement beyond the fight or flight response of our "lizard brain" amygdala.

exercise.⁵⁸ Schleiermacher further proposes that humanity bears a “taste for the Infinite,” which includes inward feelings of dependence and freedom as expressed through receptivity and initiative.⁵⁹ It seems plausible that human evolution of the mind would operate in a different sphere from this more intuitive realm, and it is open to debate whether such intuitive factors even participate in the evolutionary process. It is the work of philosophers and theologians to remind scientists that there is more to being human than our rationalistic abilities. Schleiermacher’s concept of “*Gefühl der schlechthinnigen Abhängigkeit*,” or the “feeling of absolute dependence,” suggests that more affective qualities are at least as intrinsic to being human as our cognitive abilities.⁶⁰ If humanity were to live within this sense of dependency, we would naturally exchange the quest to rule through the subjugation of the natural world to instead recognize and own our position as recipients of grace.

How Super is the Supernatural?

Presenting a rationalist perspective of the supernatural, Arthur C. Clark states that “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.”⁶¹ Such “advanced technology” serves as an extension of human intellect and achievement, the presumed answer to every problem and the key to every mystery. This anthropocentric

⁵⁸ Daniël P. Veldsman, “To Feel with and for Friedrich Schleiermacher: On Religious Experience,” *HTS Theological Studies* 75, no. 4 (2019), 1-2.

⁵⁹ Veldsman, “To Feel with and for Friedrich Schleiermacher,” 2.

⁶⁰ Veldsman, “To Feel with and for Friedrich Schleiermacher,” 1.

⁶¹ Watson-Jones, “Interdisciplinary and Cross-Cultural Preferences on Explanatory Coexistence,” 612.

perspective of rationalism centers human insight as the foundation of knowledge.⁶² Such a view positions the created order as the source for understanding and validating truth without reference to the Creator.

Whereas Clark presumes that supernatural realities will be explained away as our human intellect and accomplishments increase, a less anthropocentric view of supernatural phenomena is more open to the mind of the divine intellect. By acknowledging the limitations of humanity, the need for divinely sourced knowledge is recognized. If we open our reasoning to divine reasoning, then that which is unknowable or unprovable by human reason and effort is no less valid than that which we can perceive and control. In this case, the natural and supernatural are not in opposition to one another but are instead a spectrum of reality within and beyond human comprehension.

The usual assumption that the supernatural is wholly separate and otherworldly is deserving of challenge. It begs the question: Just how super is the supernatural? Csordas suggests that those who regularly participate in supernatural ministry may not experience the more overwhelming aspects of the supernatural such as being slain in the Spirit, perhaps because “they are already so filled with divine power on a regular basis that the force of the influx does not overwhelm them and cause them to fall.”⁶³ For those immersed in supernatural realities, the supernatural becomes quite natural and normative, but for those rooted in a rational worldview, supernatural experiences are foreign and perhaps even crisis inducing. The supernatural is presumed to be outside the natural

⁶² Wrogemann, *Intercultural Theology*, 48.

⁶³ Csordas, *The Sacred Self*, 240.

order, but who decides what is natural? For those unaccustomed to the supernatural, such experiences would seem very unnatural. For those who regularly participate in the supernatural, however, it is as natural as the air one breathes. This brings us back to epistemology. Who decides what is typical or natural within the human experience? Most likely, it is those with the measuring rod of rationalism. While some miracles have been corroborated by medical evidence, such documentation receives little attention. We see what we want to see. Or perhaps more accurately, we see what our epistemological framework tells us we see.

Good Fences Make Good Neighbors?

In referencing Max Weber's thesis regarding the "disenchantment of the world" as resulting from intellectualism and rationalism, Egil Asprem explains the pushing out of the divine and the introduction of a segregated system for dealing with the natural and supernatural:

This process was thought to be theological in origin: the invention of monotheism in antiquity pushed the divine, mysterious, capricious and "magical" out of the mundane affairs of the world, paving the way for rationalization of ethical systems and economic behavior as well as epistemology. The move from theological immanence to transcendence was radicalized during the Reformation, in polemical exchanges where the "pagan" immanence of Roman Catholicism was signaled out as heretical by Lutheran and Calvinist reformers. In the Enlightenment period, the separation of divine and world would form the basis for separating "religion" from "science": religion deals with transcendence and "ultimate concerns", while science works with empirical investigations in the domain of autonomous nature. The blueprint for the "non-overlapping magisteria" of science and religion was born.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Egil Asprem, *The Problem of Disenchantment: Scientific Naturalism and Esoteric Discourse, 1990-1939*, Numen Book Series: Studies in the History of Religions (Boston, MA: Brill, 2014), 1.

The implementation of the non-overlapping magisteria placed science and religion into separate silos so that they could avoid interference. In a cultural atmosphere dominated by rationalism, one can easily guess which silo would be viewed as the more important of the two. As those steeped in rationalistic culture are hesitant to release control and surrender to the divine, this worldview blocks and resists the flow of the Spirit, reinforcing the separation between the two silos.⁶⁵ The hyper rationalization of the world serves as a hurdle between fully integrating rational knowledge with spiritual experiences.

Divine Intervention in the Natural World

Whereas Enlightenment thinking attempts to keep the divine in its place through natural forces and fences, supernatural thinking embraces the tension between the natural and the supernatural. For rationalistic thinkers, the supernatural is perceived to be a violation of the natural world.⁶⁶ The concern is that revelation is so radical in nature that it is “not only *in* history, as we experience it, but actually *over against* it, and indeed, as inaugurating a new history in the very midst of the present one.”⁶⁷ One may wonder why a term as strong as “violate” would be used regarding supernatural phenomena. Is there an inherent desire to protect the natural world, and if the natural world must be protected,

⁶⁵ Csordas, *The Sacred Self*, ix.

⁶⁶ Watson-Jones, “Interdisciplinary and Cross-Cultural Preferences on Explanatory Coexistence,” 612.

⁶⁷ George Ille, *Between Vision and Obedience - Rethinking Theological Epistemology: Theological Reflections on Rationality and Agency with Special Reference to Paul Ricoeur and G.W.F. Hegel* (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 2014), xiv.

then from what or from whom? Alternatively, is the desire here to protect one's place and authority in the natural world?

The great challenge to divine intervention is that it is contingent upon the divine superseding the laws of nature. Benedikt Paul Göcke attempts to soften the blow of the supernatural by suggesting that God need not change or challenge universal application of natural laws but rather temporarily change the disposition of nature within one's setting to bring about God's will for the situation.⁶⁸ While Göcke's intention is appreciated, his attempt to make divine intervention more palatable is based on the minimization of the scope of the miraculous to maintain causal closure. Göcke suggests that divine intervention refrains from disrupting natural law "from the outside" so that God instead works at the "fundamental level of reality . . . changing temporarily the dispositions appropriately."⁶⁹

This reveals the effort, both from outside and within Christianity, to protect and preserve natural laws from the very One who established those laws. In separating creation from the Creator, we risk cutting off the divine source of life. Attempts at tying the hands of the Creator reject God's ability and right to work in the way God chooses. The laws of nature that have been so carefully guarded are, in fact, broken laws, fractured during the Fall of humanity. These fractured laws reflect curses that are not part of God's original plan for creation. Protecting and propping up fractured laws is foolish and makes

⁶⁸ Benedikt Paul Göcke, "Did God Do It? Metaphysical Models and Theological Hermeneutics," *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 78, no. 2 (2015), 223. Göcke employs a "dispositional account" of divine intervention so that the parting of the Red Sea is not seen as a violation of the laws of nature but rather as a temporary change of the dispositions of the water molecules so that the molecules resist gravitation and repulse one another. It is only the molecules' reaction to surrounding forces that is changed.

⁶⁹ Göcke, "Did God Do It," 224.

a false idol of nature rather than acknowledging that both humanity and nature stand in need of redemption and restoration.

Further, if God is the author of natural laws, is it not possible that divine loopholes were written into each law to read “But God . . .”? “But God remembered Noah” (Gen. 8:1), “but God was with [Joseph], and rescued him from all his afflictions” (Acts 7:9-10), “But God raised [Jesus] up, having freed him from death” (Acts 2:24), and best of all, “but God proves his love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). According to the biblical account, God seems determined to meddle in the workings of his creation.

The Apostle Paul writes a striking “but God” statement in which he challenges the practice of the Corinthians to search for new and fashionable philosophies. Paul writes, “But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God” (1 Cor. 1:27-29). What if our epistemology echoed the words of Paul that God chooses that which will shame the wise? What if our epistemology were aligned with Jesus’ choosing of children to represent stakeholders in the kingdom of heaven? This need not be an anti-intellectual epistemology but rather a way of knowing that recognizes human limitations and bias while saving space for knowledge that cannot be grasped but only received.

Michael Polanyi: Everything is Personal

We will now consider the rich contribution to the subject of knowledge by Michael Polanyi, the scientist turned philosopher who speaks with the passion and conviction of a prophet.⁷⁰ In his humble yet humorous description of the work of scientists, Polanyi writes that “Scientists—that is, creative scientists—spend their lives in trying to guess right.”⁷¹ Polanyi’s passionate pursuit of truth demonstrates a unique openness, vulnerability, and even self-sacrifice in the process of discovery:

Major discoveries change our interpretative framework. Hence it is logically impossible to arrive at these by the continued application of our previous interpretative framework. So we see once more that discovery is creative, in the sense that it is not to be achieved by the diligent performance of any previously known and specifiable procedure. This strengthens our conception of originality. The application of existing rules can produce valuable surveys, but does not advance the principles of science. We have to cross the logical gap between a problem and its solution by relying on the unspecifiable impulse of our heuristic passion, and must undergo as we do so a change of our intellectual personality. Like all ventures in which we comprehensively dispose of ourselves, such an intentional change of our personality requires a passionate motive to accomplish it. Originality must be passionate.⁷²

Polanyi’s assault on the naïve notion of pure objectivity in science challenges the view that knowledge can be depersonalized and that humanity can claim detachment in their search for truth.⁷³ He further challenges the Copernican system, which elevated theory-based knowledge over knowledge perceived through sensory experience.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Amartya Sen, foreword to *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), xiii.

⁷¹ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London, UK: Routledge, 1962), 151.

⁷² Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 151.

⁷³ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 394, see also 2.

⁷⁴ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 2.

Polanyi contends that understanding the pursuit of knowledge to be fundamentally personal in nature is more grounded in reality. This is illustrated by his questioning of why Copernicus would elect to change his “actual terrestrial station for an imaginary solar standpoint.”⁷⁵ One can theorize what it would be like to perceive something from a point of view beyond themselves. However, imagining that such theorizing reflects truth is the height of pretense. Brueggemann presents this proclivity to position oneself as a detached outsider in terms of losing the astonishment of an insider.⁷⁶

Polanyi rejects the notion that humanity can transcend our own subjectivity, going so far as to refer to complete objectivity as delusional.⁷⁷ Pure objectivity is an aspirational ideal that has been disguised as factually plausible. The attempt to depersonalize the pursuit of knowledge risks self-deception in that one’s thoughts are elevated to the status of near infallibility, towering over any act of knowing that admits to being more personal or subjective. While the prospect of discovering and determining truth from an ivory tower unsullied by human experience, emotion, and motivations is alluring, it is not realistic. As Julian Huxley suggests, scientists should acknowledge that they not only bring their personal sensibilities to their work, but they are also dependent upon moral and material support from surrounding culture.⁷⁸ As scientists are influenced by the power of government, industry, and public perception, they should not maintain the

⁷⁵ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 2.

⁷⁶ Brueggemann, *Abiding Astonishment*, 37.

⁷⁷ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 18.

⁷⁸ Mary Jo Nye, *Michael Polanyi and His Generation: Origins of the Social Construction of Science* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 188.

pretense of being immune to political influence. The practice of science is social in nature.⁷⁹

Polanyi may be best known for asserting that the theory of tacit knowing is profoundly personal. In describing this more intuitive form of knowledge, he states that “we can know more than we can tell.”⁸⁰ Polanyi, along with Thomas Kuhn, developed a social epistemology of science that relied more on this experiential form of knowledge than on the exclusive use of empiricism and reason.⁸¹ A prime example of this, according to Polanyi, is the ability to recognize a person’s face out of thousands of faces without being able to precisely explain how this is accomplished.⁸² Perception of truth or reality can occur without specific knowledge of all the particulars, and Polanyi argues that although this knowledge is difficult to describe, it is central to our reception of knowledge.⁸³ Polanyi’s concept of tacit knowing makes sense of intuition and hunches, which happen to be common methods of knowing within supernatural ministry.⁸⁴

Realms of Authority for Polanyi and Schleiermacher

Polanyi’s description of reality, comprised of various strata connected and yet residing in higher and lower levels, is especially applicable to this study.⁸⁵ Polanyi

⁷⁹ Nye, *Michael Polanyi and His Generation*, 188.

⁸⁰ Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 4.

⁸¹ Nye, *Michael Polanyi and His Generation*, xv.

⁸² Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 4.

⁸³ Amarta Sen, foreword to *The Tacit Dimension*, x.

⁸⁴ There is often an intuitive aspect to spiritual gifts, including prophecy, word of knowledge, and healing.

⁸⁵ Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 35.

proposes that “operations at a higher level cannot be accounted for by the laws governing its particulars forming the lower level.”⁸⁶ While biologists may expect that all forms of life can be explained by the same laws that govern inanimate matter, such laws have no way of taking into account the sentience of human beings and are therefore insufficient to rule over scientific work regarding sentient beings.⁸⁷ If the lower-level laws of insentient life are unsuitable for direct study of the higher-level sentient life, then natural laws would also be unfit to judge that which falls within the category of supernatural law. The skeptic may be staunchly resistant to receiving revelation from a higher level, but this does not authorize her to dictate laws that restrain, regulate, or discredit the workings of a higher realm.

Even as a grain of sand cannot comprehend the relatively gigantic worker ant that walks upon it, and as the ant cannot comprehend the human being who views it through the magnifying glass, humanity is similarly ill-equipped to understand the things of God without God’s assistance. Paul expresses this in Rom. 11:33: “Oh, the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways!”

Revelation is crucial to spiritual and religious thought, for we can only know that which is above us as it is revealed to us. Whether this is experienced through breadcrumbs of natural revelation or by the megaphone of burning bushes, prophecy, and various channels of supernatural revelation, our knowledge is dependent upon revelation. Therefore, an epistemology is needed that postulates truth from a higher level down

⁸⁶ Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 36.

⁸⁷ Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 37.

rather than seeking to impose limitations on divine realities and the divine Person from the lower level of human experience.

Schleiermacher's understanding of higher and lower consciousness overlaps with Polanyi's strata of reality, with attention to the relationship between humanity and the divine. According to Schleiermacher, when a sense of dependence upon the transcendent is blocked, the lower consciousness experiences constraint and captivity so that the individual becomes highly dependent upon and reactive to outside influences within the lower realm.⁸⁸ However, when absolute dependence is focused upon a power that is both transcendent and immanent, the individual experiences freedom.⁸⁹ This state of dependency upon the transcendent resonates with the concept of vulnerability previously discussed. In a counterintuitive turn, dependence leads to freedom, and vulnerability leads to supernatural power.

The ongoing tension between two spheres or strata of reality (religion and science, faith and reason, the supernatural and natural) is that the sphere inhabited by the divine waits upon the sphere inhabited by humanity to make "a personal decision for a truth which is independent of human nature," a proposition which is nothing less than "scandalous."⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Jacqueline Marina, "Schleiermacher on the Outpourings of the Inner Fire: Experiential Expressivism and Religious Pluralism," *Religious Studies* 40, no. 2 (2004): 137.

⁸⁹ Marina, "Schleiermacher on the Outpourings of the Inner Fire," 137.

⁹⁰ Balthasar, *The God Question and Modern Man*, 3.

A Challenge to the Stratum Hypothesis

Polanyi's view of religious beliefs as inhabiting a higher stratum may be problematic because it can dismiss the factual and historical nature of supernatural phenomena that could be observed and even measured by those within a lower stratum. Polanyi speaks of historical evidence of religious narratives as serving to "augment the strength of Christian teaching," yet he does not see such historical evidence as also confirming these teachings.⁹¹ Alignment in matters of faith and history are viewed more as a pleasant bonus than an apologetic necessity. Polanyi believes that many Biblical narratives have been "weakened or destroyed" by accounts demonstrating "magical powers," discrediting these narratives to the point that modern-day theologians must reinterpret the Christian faith in a "truer form."⁹² Polanyi quotes progressive theologian, Paul Tillich, as confirmation of his views:

Science, psychology, and history are allies of theology in the fight against the supernaturalistic distortions of genuine revelation. Scientific and historical criticism protect revelation; they cannot dissolve it, for revelation belongs to a dimension of reality for which scientific and historical analysis are inadequate. Revelation is the manifestation of the depth of reason and the ground of being. It points to the mystery of existence and to our ultimate concern. It is independent of what science and history say about the conditions in which it appears; and it cannot make science and history dependent on itself. No conflict between different dimensions of reality is possible. Reason receives revelation in ecstasy and miracles; but reason is not destroyed by revelation, just as revelation is not emptied by reason.⁹³

Tillich's words are so beautiful that one could easily miss their full implications, for the possibility of supernatural phenomena caused by divine action in the real world is

⁹¹ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 298.

⁹² Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 298.

⁹³ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 298, quotes Paul Tillich 140, *Systematic Theology*, 1, London, 1953, 130 in note 1.

sacrificed to protect and isolate faith and reason within separate silos. While Tillich and, by extension, Polanyi attempt to liberate revelation from the dominion of science, history, and perhaps even reason itself, the glaring danger is that matters of faith become irrelevant to realities that reside below it. Such spiritual matters become a cherry on top of the natural world rather than a relevant force within it.

Polanyi quotes Tillich once again, this time rescuing revelation from the expectation that it be factual while simultaneously protecting rational thinking from the inconvenient intrusion of any measurable evidence of the divine: “Knowledge of revelation, although it is mediated primarily through historical events, does not imply factual assertion, and it is therefore not exposed to critical analysis by historical research. Its truth is to be judged by criteria which lie within the dimension of revelatory knowledge.”⁹⁴

Tillich presents these dimensions of reality as independent from one another rather than interconnected. Revelation need not be factual, and the only measurement for revelation is found within the revelatory realm. In this understanding, revelation points to that which is above us. However, as divine revelation also unlocks the mystery of that which is within us, revelation is therefore as essential to the task of understanding what it means to be human as it is to comprehend the divine. If the scientist provides a greater understanding that unlocks the mysteries of atoms and animals, matter and microbes, which reside on a lower dimension or stratum, is humanity not equally dependent upon revelation from a higher source of truth in order to fully understand the human condition?

⁹⁴ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 298, quotes Paul Tillich 144, *Systematic Theology*, 1, London, 1953, 130 in note 1.

Atheist scientist and author Richard Dawkins challenges the idea that religion can stay off of “science’s turf, restricting itself to morals and values” because the difference between science and religion is scientific in nature: “Religions make existence claims, and this means scientific claims.”⁹⁵ Balthasar presents these claims as specifically having to do with the historical Person of Christ as witnessed through his life, death, self-interpretation, and resurrection, so that “in order to grasp the essence of Christianity, one will first have to consider what it says about itself.”⁹⁶ Dawkins, Balthasar, and the Apostle Paul appear to agree regarding the cruciality of the historical nature of religious belief. Pointing to the resurrection through which divine action and revelation physically and factually entered this terrestrial realm as the make-or-break event of Christianity, Paul writes that the validity of our faith is contingent upon the resurrection of Jesus. Paul states: “If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain,” we are “found to be false witnesses of God,” and soberingly, our “faith is worthless,” for we remain in our sins (1 Cor. 15:14-15; 17).

While Polanyi’s caution against holding higher revelation hostage by lower levels of knowledge is appreciated, there is little expectation that higher revelation will make any measurable difference on that which is below it. However, the miracles demonstrated in Scripture would suggest otherwise. From the large-scale impact of the parting of the Red Sea (Exod. 14) to the personal transformation experienced by a man born blind as a sign of new creation (John 9), God reveals not only intellectual and moral truth but also

⁹⁵ Richard Dawkins, “When Religion Steps on Science’s Turf,” *Free Inquiry*, 1998, 3. When Religion Steps on Science’s Turf (spiritual-minds.com). Dawkins is challenging the concept of the non-overlapping magisterial as advocated by Stephen Jay Gould.

⁹⁶ Balthasar, *The God Question and Modern Man*, 1-2.

power that upturns our natural laws and assumptions, while transforming our everyday lives.

Further, despite expectations of a hierarchy of authority that could be extrapolated from Polanyi's perspective, it seems evident in his view that humanity claims the greatest position of power over both that which is below and that which is above. This anthropocentric view positions humanity not only as rational judge over each layer of existence below it but also refuses to surrender to a divine expression of suprarationality above it. As is demonstrated by Polanyi and Tillich, even those who are friendly to matters of faith and revelation may seek to place limitations upon God so that a rational person may believe in God without his beliefs and biases being vulnerable to divine meddling. Accordingly, good walls make good neighbors where faith and reason are concerned. Faith and reason may be regarded as equal so long as they remain separate. In this system, concepts such as supernatural realities are either rejected as archaic or received as allegoric, and the concept of suprarational knowledge is simply not discussed.

In practice, religious epistemology often views supernatural revelation and experience as a bonus level for those interested rather than a critical key capable of unlocking every layer of existence. In such a system, there is no expectation for the natural to fall prostrate to the supernatural or for the rational mind to open to the mind of God. God is perfectly welcome in our hearts and our religion, provided that God keeps his distance while we remain the purveyors of truth and dictators of what God can and cannot do within the realm of humanity.

Despite objections regarding Polanyi's inconsistent application of his view that the operation of lower levels should not govern higher operations, Polanyi's passion,

honesty, and vulnerability regarding scientific discovery is an important contribution to the ongoing development of a supernatural epistemology. In fact, his description of the work of scientists reflects a metanoic process that may give God just enough wiggle room to surprise us: “We call [scientists’] work creative because it changes the world as we see it, by deepening our understanding of it. The change is irrevocable . . . Having made a discovery, I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes have become different; I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently.”⁹⁷

Conclusion

The expediency of equipping followers of Jesus for Spirit-empowered ministry stands within a philosophical and religious context in which the supernatural has been sidelined and dismissed. Delving into these cultural forces that resist the supernatural is needed to dismantle their pervasive and prohibitive hold over people of faith. Asking disciples to continue the inherently supernatural work of Jesus with one arm tied behind their backs due to the barriers our culture has erected against the in-breaking presence and power of God is unfair and obscures the power of the kingdom of God.

Our work continues in the wake of well-meaning rationalist apologists who have sought to protect both their scientific worldview and the historicity of biblical narratives, sacrificing the possibility of divine intervention in the process by explaining away the miraculous nature of the biblical accounts.⁹⁸ To reclaim the validity and availability of supernatural ministry, we must reassess and deconstruct our philosophical assumptions in

⁹⁷ Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, 151.

⁹⁸ Wrogemann, *Intercultural Theology*, 50.

order to create systems of belief that are open to the Person, presence, and power of the Holy Spirit. Identifying the epistemological framework that we have inherited is crucial to forming an epistemology that empowers people of faith. If we attempt to obey Christ's commission to supernatural ministry while lugging around an epistemology bound in rationalism, we will be frustrated and disappointed. Although epistemologies are usually created unconsciously through a slow absorption of culture, we can intentionally construct an epistemology that makes room for divine presence, action, and revelation.

Despite grave implications of rationalistic epistemology upon supernatural ministry in the West, Jason A. Josephson-Storm notes that spiritualist practices have continued throughout human history, with numerous examples of occult practices and belief systems in our modern world. One must ask if our world has not so much experienced a disenchantment with the supernatural but rather a disenchantment with Christianity.⁹⁹ The vast number of people participating in occultic practices, as well as the preponderance of forms of entertainment rooted in supernatural themes, suggest that neither science nor modernist Christian practices are meeting a deep-seated need within human experience. By reclaiming our supernatural DNA, Christianity is well able to engage those who are hungry for more.

The shakiness of our epistemological foundation has more to do with our perception of the source of knowledge than our method of knowing. Returning to the story of Adam and Eve, the great tragedy is not that Eve desired knowledge but rather that she elected to become the source of that knowledge. By vetoing God's revelatory

⁹⁹ Jason A. Josephson-Storm, *The Myth of Disenchantment: Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

command, Eve positioned herself not only as the judge of truth but also as the source of truth.

The immediate consequence of Eve and Adam's decision was that they compromised their relationship with God. Their effortless state of being with God was replaced by fear of God. Walking with God was replaced by hiding from God. Notably, while their decision did not alter or diminish God's affection for them, it dramatically diminished their ability to feel safe with God. Their vulnerability, or nakedness, became a liability rather than a gift. The epistemological implication of Eve's rebellion is that knowledge is something to be taken rather than something to be received. In this world-shattering decision, two crucial factors of supernatural theology were rejected: grace and vulnerability. The rejection of God as the source of knowledge is a rejection of grace, and the curse of fear made vulnerability to the divine a liability rather than a gift. While our epistemological problem has been fueled by Western rationalistic thinking, it originated with the Fall of humanity. Long before the Enlightenment, skepticism came into play as the serpent asked, "Has God indeed said . . ." (Gen. 3:1). So began our epistemological crisis.

To return to the consideration of who is welcome at the epistemological table and who has authority to assist with the construction of epistemology, let us remember that the oppressed and marginalized have a voice in God's kingdom. If our epistemological practices do not reflect kingdom values and practices, then it is time to deconstruct methodologies that silence voices and make the epistemological table smaller. If we are to shape an epistemology that is open to the supernatural, there remains one Voice that must be welcomed once again. Tragically, one of the most marginalized voices within

Western Christianity has been the voice of God. It is imperative that followers of Jesus challenge the Western bias against divine revelation and, even further, invite God to speak and act.

Like the Protestant Reformation, the Enlightenment located the source of authority within human intellect. Leonard Sweet laments that “we’ve developed more of a faith ‘perspective’ than a faith ‘posture.’”¹⁰⁰ Our faith perspective focuses on what we perceive, whereas our faith posture is open to what we may receive. An epistemology open to the work of the Spirit begins with a posture of receptivity rather than rigid adherence to manmade ideologies. A supernatural epistemology is created through living one’s life in the Spirit to the degree that we are “guided by the Spirit.”¹⁰¹ This guidance is experienced through relationship with God. Referencing medieval philosopher Maimonides’ understanding of the knowledge of God, Sweet writes, “For Maimonides, the knowledge of God was more than *amor Dei intellectualis*—ideas about loving God. Far from a mere idea, faith was a living encounter with the living God.”¹⁰²

An epistemology that is friendly to the work of the Spirit may be crafted from the outside in by those with earnest intentions to create space for God. In Acts 17:27, Paul states that humans were created “so that they would search for God and perhaps fumble about for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us.” Could it be that even our most committed theologians are often fumbling to find God? If we are to

¹⁰⁰ Leonard Sweet, *Out of the Question—Into the Mystery: Getting Lost in the Godlife Relationship* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook Press, 2004), 14.

¹⁰¹ Galatians 5:25

¹⁰² Sweet, *Out of the Question—Into the Mystery*, 14.

go beyond an epistemology that is friendly to the Spirit to instead be guided and empowered by the Spirit, then this epistemology must be created from the inside out.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

The purpose of this Doctor of Ministry project is to lead participants through a process of identifying and removing barriers to Spirit-empowered ministry, thereby opening a channel through which God's supernatural grace may freely flow. The previous chapters have outlined biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations. This groundwork provides the rationale and strategy for this ministry project designed to empower followers of Jesus for supernatural ministry. The problem identified is the lack of Spirit-empowered workers for a post-Christendom mission field due to cognitive and affective barriers to the supernatural. This project was implemented to test my hypothesis that leading ordinary followers of Jesus through a process to reclaim the validity and availability of the supernatural through a *metanoia* of heart and mind will liberate them to participate in supernatural ministry.

By participating in group discussion, journaling, questionnaires, and post-project interviews, participants had the opportunity to identify and remove limiting beliefs and accept a newfound freedom through the Holy Spirit. The project was implemented through six teaching sessions and a closing celebratory gathering that provided additional time to process learnings, celebrate growth, and consider next steps. The objective of this project was achieved in that participants were open to experiencing transformation

regarding their understanding of Spirit-empowered ministry and in that they demonstrated readiness for supernatural ministry.

This project emerged as a synthesis of my spiritual journey and ministry context within First United Methodist Church of Hobbs. In my experience of pastoring within the UMC, I have discerned an openness to the work of the Spirit and a hunger for more of God. However, this is tempered by a need for more teaching on the Spirit and a paucity of models and mentors for Spirit-empowered ministry. The study created for this project would be ideal for use in traditional congregations as well as in fresh expressions that seek to move beyond the walls of the Church. Spirit-empowered ministry flourishes in outward-focused, apostolic mission. However, due to a lack of teaching, modeling, and training on spiritual gifts and supernatural ministry, well-meaning evangelistic efforts can be self-powered rather than Spirit-empowered. Resources such as the content and workbook used for this study are needed to equip disciples to continue the supernatural ministry of Jesus.

The biblical grounding of this study draws meaning and implications from Matt. 9:35-10:1, revealing primary motivations of compassion and urgency that lead to supernatural ministry within the Lord's harvest. It is not uncommon for life-long Christians to believe that the mission of the Church can be accomplished by hard work, good intentions, and programmatic efforts. The mission of Jesus, as shared with the disciples and recounted by Matthew, however, is wholly dependent upon God's commissioning, authorizing, and sending of modern-day shepherd-harvesters to do the works that Jesus did. This means that the process for equipping disciples to enter the harvest field should implement a methodology that is intentionally aligned with the

ministry of Jesus. The ministry described within Matt. 9:35-10:1 lays out a model that is motivated by Christlike compassion and a sense of urgency. This model carries the authority of Jesus to demonstrate miracles in a posture of vulnerability. Authority and vulnerability go hand-in-hand in the kingdom of God, for shepherd-harvesters exemplify the same vulnerability as the sheep to whom they are sent.

The history of the Methodist movement reveals a rich supernatural DNA seldom discussed in United Methodist circles today. John Wesley's openness to and dependence upon the work of the Spirit is often brushed over in favor of discussing his theology and disciple-making process. Had Wesley been resistant to the move of the Spirit within early Methodism, it is questionable whether the United Methodist Church would exist today. Supernatural ministry, including healing, deliverance, and manifestations of the Holy Spirit, was part of the shared experience of John Wesley and the early Methodists. A lack of knowledge regarding our spiritual roots has created a barrier to the work of the Spirit in the United Methodist Church today. The greatest hope for reclaiming our missional momentum lies in reclaiming our spiritual heritage.

In addition to reclaiming our supernatural history, this project's objective is to unlearn prohibitive theological perspectives that have compromised our mission. This is accomplished by identifying and removing theological barriers to Spirit-empowered ministry. Our theological inheritance as Western Christians is comprised of a mixture of blessings and hindrances. This includes theological movements such as the Protestant Reformation, which is often heralded with little thought for what was sacrificed in the process. This project has sought to initiate a fresh reformation of the Spirit, both in the intentional unlearning of aspects of Western Christianity that have disempowered

Christian disciples and the deliberate engagement of a theologically grounded understanding of the power of the Holy Spirit.

Additional roadblocks to supernatural ministry derive from cultural influences, specifically Enlightenment rationalism and skepticism. Through my research on the interdisciplinary subject of epistemology, I delved into belief systems that have played significant roles in the rejection of divine intervention and revelation. Whereas the Protestant Reformation sidelined and discounted the validity of the supernatural while maintaining a strong emphasis on religion and faith, Enlightenment thinking substituted rational pursuits for faith, sometimes seeing them as mutually exclusive.

Each of the foundations papers positively influenced my project, providing greater depth and reflecting the academic exploration which undergirds my project. I approached my research with the primary goal of equipping laborers for the harvest, but in implementing the project, I also had the opportunity to consider this work from the perspective of discipleship. The harvest indeed needs workers, but Christian disciples also need harvest ministry. Entering the harvest with the supernatural tools provided by Jesus is essential if individuals are to become fully-formed disciples of Christ. Interestingly, although themes of calling and purpose were not addressed in my teaching segments, these concepts began to emerge in participant responses. During the follow-up interview, one individual said, “[I’m] trying to understand everything that’s been presented and knowing where I fit in that. Where do I fit in this supernatural expression, and what’s my calling? What’s my job?” Harvest ministry fulfills a deep longing within disciples to make a difference and live into one’s God-given identity. It is imperative that Christ-followers receive the training needed to equip and release them into the Lord’s

harvest field. The following analysis provides a description of the methodology and implementation of the project, as well as a summary of learning.

Methodology

Project Overview

Data was gathered using a qualitative research approach, measuring movement from discomfort and/or disbelief regarding supernatural realities to openness and readiness to participate in this form of ministry. The data collection tools implemented were questionnaires, class discussions, journal prompts, and interviews. The pre-project and post-project questionnaires revealed development in understanding and openness to the subject by asking the same questions at the beginning and conclusion of the class. Class discussions offered fluid conversation in which class members engaged not only in the subject of the lesson but also in one another's perspectives. Journal prompts provided the opportunity for participants to further process concepts presented in class and from their weekly reading while also enabling introverts to engage the subject on a more level playing field. Individual post-project interviews provided an additional opportunity for participants to respond to the content, express future goals, and demonstrate growth in readiness to participate in Spirit-empowered ministry.

Professional associates provided feedback on the foundations chapters that guided the project, as well as helping me process learnings, and context associates provided on-the-ground support and guidance during the implementation of the project. My primary context associate assigned participant identification numbers and assisted with collecting

questionnaires and journals to protect confidentiality. This associate provided feedback after sessions, and we are currently selecting a resource to use for a follow-up training on healing room ministry.

Group Participants

This seven-week class was comprised of thirteen members of First United Methodist Church of Hobbs, each of whom took part in class discussions, responded to three weekly journal entries, answered questionnaires, and participated in individual interviews. Participants were given confidential identification numbers to connect the data from their questionnaires with their journals. The majority of participants have been members of the United Methodist Church for decades, although many were either raised in other denominations or have experience worshipping in other denominations. One participant joined the UMC within the past year (having attended charismatic and non-denominational churches previously), and several others have worshiped in churches or with groups that are open to the work of the Spirit.

Although this project primarily focused on denominational influence, I was concerned that only one of the thirteen participants was male. This was disappointing in that I wanted to discern how the content resonates with both men and women. Interestingly, in asking our male participant if he had feedback regarding how the class experience could more intentionally and effectively engage men, his response gave no indication that the class content or atmosphere needed to be changed for this purpose.

Several persons in the group indicated that the class was not what they initially expected. Although not explicitly stated, I suspect that participants expected the class to

be focused on practical training, more in line with a spiritual gifts class that I taught previously. Despite their surprise regarding the more academic nature of the class, group members rose to the challenge and kept coming back. In fact, all thirteen participants completed the course and demonstrated growth to varying degrees. The resounding sentiment upon completion of the class was, “What’s next?”

Implementation

Schedule and Overview of Content

The ministry project included seven sessions, beginning on September 6th and concluding on October 18th. The first and final sessions were held in person at FUMC, with snacks and a meal, respectively, and the remaining sessions were held online via Zoom. The first session provided time for introductions and the final session focused on celebrating learnings and therefore did not utilize a workbook chapter or new content. The second through sixth sessions were based on insight from my research.

The opening and closing in-person gatherings were scheduled to last two hours each; this accommodated filling out pre-project and post-project questionnaires. Each of the online classes was scheduled to last an hour and a half. Holding a significant portion of the classes online enabled more people to participate and yet seemed to inhibit the friendly engagement that occurred during the two in-person sessions. Participants received workbooks with six chapters, journal prompts, and a recommended list of additional resources for continued study. Journals were submitted during the final

session, and interviews were conducted within one month following the final session.

Twelve were held in person and one was held by phone.

Even with sessions lasting between 1 ½ to 2 hours, teaching new content, building a sense of community, and providing adequate time for participants to respond to questions was challenging. Given the time and comfort level needed to process content, I could envision this study being implemented within a home group setting or incorporated into a weekend retreat. For groups desiring to condense sessions into a one-hour time period typical for Sunday school and small group sessions, I would recommend one or more of the following options: 1. Cover each chapter over a two-week period to provide adequate time for teaching and class discussion; 2. Require reading ahead of class to familiarize participants with the content; 3. Host a closing fellowship gathering to discuss learnings and celebrate growth over a meal without the one-hour time constraint.

The content of each session can be described as uprooting barriers to supernatural ministry. The first session invited participants to register their reservations about supernatural ministry; these reservations and biases form the first barrier typically encountered to supernatural concepts. Session two revealed motivational barriers (lack of compassion and urgency) to harvest ministry as empowered by the Holy Spirit. Session three detailed theological barriers that have been erected through theological movements within the history of the Church. Session four delved into the spiritual roots of the Methodist movement, revealing a barrier of silence that has obscured our supernatural DNA and disempowered United Methodists through a lack of knowledge. Session five grappled with cultural and epistemological barriers, notably Enlightenment rationalism. Session six revealed the barrier of making oneself the source of power for ministry as

well as the prevalent discomfort with vulnerability. Each barrier presents an inner resistance to the working of God through us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Considerations for In-Person and Online Conversations

While group members did engage in class discussion during Zoom sessions, conversation did not flow as freely during online sessions as during in-person gatherings. I suspect that non-verbal cues are more easily read in-person, which would assist with engagement. Further, although I have personally experienced meaningful conversations using online platforms, the Zoom platform was likely unfamiliar for some group members, while others may have experienced Zoom fatigue.

The sense of disconnect during online sessions could further be due to individuals coming to class after a long day of work with little time to eat dinner. Beyond this, it is possible that the weariness experienced during sessions may have been the result of a spiritual attack against these individuals as they entered the deep waters of supernatural ministry. Persons leading this class in the future should seek out a prayer team to intentionally cover the group in prayer for divine protection.

Considerations for Introverted/Extroverted Engagement

Class discussions were fruitful and positive overall, and yet it was challenging to encourage participation from all parties. More extroverted verbal processors sometimes went beyond the scope of the discussion, whereas more introverted participants were somewhat reluctant to share during class discussions. In teaching this class again, I would incorporate a bell or other time-keeping tool to call participants to wrap up their

comments should they find themselves in the weeds or on another topic altogether. Given the hesitance of some participants to contribute to the conversation, however, I wanted to avoid the risk of embarrassing or shaming individuals at all costs during this premier class offering. One participant indicated during the post-project interview that they typically expect others to be more able or competent to speak, which reaffirmed my priority of creating a permission-giving atmosphere.

Layers of Learning

Tools for processing concepts were utilized within this study to assist the participant in the learning process, several of which doubled as data-gathering tools. Because the goal of the project was personal transformation, it was as important to challenge and stretch group members as it was to inform them. The layers of learning incorporated in the project are:

1. Teaching Segments: It was essential that new information be introduced into this learning experience, given the conspicuous lack of knowledge regarding the Holy Spirit and supernatural realities within United Methodist congregations.
2. “Take 2” Articles: This content was presented in the workbook for students to read following each session. Rather than reiterating what was discussed during class, these articles approached the content in new ways. One participant noted that they took to heart information in a “Take 2” segment regarding the supernatural nature of Holy Communion, and they experienced a greater appreciation of receiving this sacrament in worship as a result.

3. Invitation Prayer: Each class session closed with an “Invitation Prayer” spoken aloud in unison by the group as presented in the workbook; the prayer was also printed at the beginning of the accompanying journal prompts for the week. Although many charismatic resources typically refer to this type of prayer as “Activation Prayers,” I opted to instead designate these as “Invitation Prayers.” Based on my experience within mainline Christianity, I believe this language is more familiar and welcome. These prayers served as an “invitation” to the Holy Spirit while also assisting with the work of processing the content in such a way as to “activate” concepts learned. Praying with specificity regarding session themes connected head knowledge with the available presence and power of the Spirit to bring these concepts to life. One particular “Invitation Prayer” for which participants expressed appreciation is found in week six:

Gracious God, I keep showing up because I believe you have more for me. And yet, it is sometimes hard to trust that you are willing to use me! What if I fail? What if I blow it? Please comfort and encourage me when I’m feeling vulnerable and afraid. Help me surrender myself and the situation to you in those moments when I’m tempted to control and manipulate. I’m here, Lord. I’m willing. And I trust you to meet me here. Make me a willing channel of your supernatural grace. Amen.

4. Class Discussion: While class discussion served as a data-gathering tool, it also served a critical role in helping participants process content. Class discussion provides a much-needed atmosphere of dynamic learning beyond the printed curriculum. As will be revealed in the Summary of Learning section, class discussion created a sense of community that will be crucial as group members move forward in supernatural ministry.

5. **Journal Entries:** Participants journaled three questions per week during the first five weeks and four questions during the sixth week for this data gathering tool. Since much of the content was new to participants, journal entries were indispensable in providing the opportunity to further process information and provide feedback. This engagement was crucial for promoting the self-awareness needed for spiritual formation and providing the metaphorical grain of sand to create a pearl of inner transformation.
6. **Pre/Post-Project Questionnaires:** In addition to measuring the development of understanding of concepts related to the project, the questions were intended to raise new possibilities in the minds of participants regarding Spirit-empowered ministry from the very outset of the project and to reinforce them during the final session. The greatest change demonstrated in questionnaires did not primarily relate to information gleaned but rather to participants' self-awareness and readiness to move forward.
7. **Post-Project Interviews:** These one-on-one interviews allowed me to focus on each participant to gauge how they have synthesized the class experience overall. These conversations further provided a valuable opportunity for pastoral counseling and personal discipling that is important in helping individuals accept and claim God's supernatural power. The interviews revealed that participants' interaction with supernatural concepts is closely linked with their view of God and of self. Developing our understanding of supernatural ministry is itself an act of spiritual formation. While future leaders of this study may be tempted to omit

the follow-up interview for the sake of time, I would strongly recommend that these crucial conversations be prioritized.

Class Sessions

I will provide a description below of the focus of each class session, including content gathered from the data, as applicable:

Session One: Introduction to Spirit-Empowered Ministry— This opening session provided an overview of the class, an opportunity to turn in informed consent forms and fill out pre-project questionnaires (Appendix C), and hand out workbooks with journal prompts (Appendix E). We also discussed common pre-conceived ideas about the concept of supernatural phenomena.

Based on feedback received during class discussion, I would spend more time in future iterations of this class clarifying which supernatural experiences are promoted within Scripture, which are prohibited by Scripture, and more thoroughly acknowledging negative examples of supernatural ministry as seen in the news and presented by Hollywood. It is important that group members have adequate opportunity to register their reservations regarding supernatural concepts and phenomena, as these misgivings are the first barrier that must be considered in this study.

Session Two: Motivation for Ministry— The group discussed compassion and urgency as key motivators for harvest ministry, as described in Matthew 9:35-10:1. This chapter served as a familiar onramp for church members accustomed to Bible study formats. Congregations and individuals lacking the motivating impulses of compassion

and urgency are likely to be more hesitant to take risks in supernatural ministry. Lack of motivation for the sake of others is a significant barrier to supernatural ministry.

Although responses during class discussion of this chapter were mostly commonplace, a more distinctly outward-focused mission mindset emerged later in the study. I suspect this was largely in response to the group's interest in John Wesley's field preaching, as discussed in session four, as this more clearly illustrated supernatural harvest ministry within our faith tradition. Although sessions focused on a new topic each week, the intention was that the amalgamation of learning would be greater than the sum of its parts. The evolving understanding of and urgency for harvest ministry by participants gave evidence of this.

Session Three: Roadblocks to the Work of the Spirit— By studying key theological movements and acknowledging their impact, our class took steps to unlearn anti-supernatural theology that has negatively influenced and obscured our view of Spirit-empowered ministry. A few members confided that they found the vocabulary and academic nature of certain portions of the class to be challenging, and the theological movement content seemed to overwhelm participants as if they were drinking from a firehose. As one participant confided, “The beginning was super hard because I feel stupid. I don't know any of these words. I'm getting lost, but I'm learning stuff. I need to challenge my brain.” This comment from a gifted, grace-filled member of the class confirmed the need to simplify the theological content in the future.

Several of the theological barriers covered by the curriculum may not directly affect the majority of those raised within the Wesleyan/Arminian theological tradition as held by United Methodists. For the most part, life-long Methodists have been shaped

more by silence on the work of the Spirit than by theological teaching against the work of the Spirit. However, given that United Methodist congregations are often comprised of members from diverse denominational backgrounds, it remains important to teach about Calvinism, predestination, and cessationism.

Session Four: Our Methodist Identity— This session on the early Methodist movement was the most popular teaching element of the study. An overwhelming amount of data reflected participants' surprise and interest in learning about the supernatural DNA of Methodism. Group members found the Spirit-infused nature of our history to be exciting and surprising, with expressions of “What? Really! How cool is that?!” and “Way to go, John Wesley!” One respondent said that “our story is kind of amazing. We were not a meek, mild, socially acceptable movement.”

In a thoughtful response to how the supernatural history of our tradition has been lost or overlooked, another participant lamented, “It made me sad that we left that behind, that it got lost in the shuffle. We cleaned up Christianity. Jesus wasn't afraid of messes, and that made me sad. We cleaned up the Gospel, almost made it sterile, didn't we? Because it's safer, or we think it is.”

Session Five: Philosophy, Culture, and Belief— Cultural influences are most often absorbed in such a way that we do not recognize how these influences have colored our thinking and perception. This session revealed how our philosophical lenses could obscure the validity and availability of Spirit-empowered ministry. In Enlightenment epistemology, there is resistance to receiving knowledge, revelation, or power from the divine. This session confronted our appropriation of Enlightenment thinking, unlearning that which is unhelpful in the life of discipleship so that we may reestablish God as our

Source of knowledge, power, and provision. I was initially concerned about how this content would be received by the class, yet this session afforded one of our more energetic class discussions. Although the philosophical aspects of this session were not widely reflected in the data, the concept of God as our Source, reiterated in session six, was a common theme in participant responses.

Session Six: The Source Exchange— This final teaching segment, which focused on making a Source Exchange between our power and the power of the Spirit, resonated instantly with participants. This session developed the concept of vulnerability, which arose in the second session and further built upon the concept of our Source as established in the fifth session. The Source Exchange concept featured prominently in post-project questionnaires and interviews. One group member described their primary barrier to supernatural ministry as “Just me trying to do it in my own power. I’m the biggest barrier.” This may have been the greatest takeaway from the class: by seeking to do God’s work in our own strength, we become the greatest barrier to supernatural ministry.

Session Seven: Celebration— Our final gathering served as an opportunity to share concepts learned, celebrate growth, and discuss next steps. Participants were so engaged that it was difficult to keep to the schedule; this session lasted just over two and a half hours. A strong sense of community emerged and was explicitly named during this session. We closed by placing a drop of frankincense oil on our hands and anointing our heads and/or hearts as we prayed for God to work within us through the Holy Spirit.

Summary of Learning

The project yielded data from pre/post-questionnaires and written journals submitted by thirteen participants, as well as data gathered during class discussions and follow-up interviews. This enabled me to track the development of participants using three confidential data points and two data points for which I knew the identities of those reporting. This was challenging in that data could not be correlated between confidential and non-confidential responses.

A primary goal of this project was to produce a cognitive and affective change in participants. While cognitive change was achieved, I believe the greater change rendered was affective in nature. In reflecting on my teaching methodology, I used information as a tool to uproot barriers rather than as a goal in itself. This was evident in participant responses. For instance, it was not my intention that the group be able to exhaustively describe the Protestant Reformation or define epistemology. Rather, I wanted participants to recognize the vast number of forces that have erected barriers to obscure the validity and availability of the Spirit's power, to identify those resistant forces in their own lives, and to move them aside. Information was the tool; formation was the process; freedom was the goal.

Barriers to Spirit-Empowered Ministry

The agenda of this project was to systematically identify and remove common points of resistance to supernatural ministry. A major revelation came through participants' self-identification of affective barriers that went beyond what was presented in class sessions. Given that the goal of the project was to create a *metanoia* of heart and

mind, it is an exciting mark of success that the learning experience opened new doors to transformation beyond what was contained in the lesson plan.

Questions posed in journal entries, questionnaires, and interviews were largely open-ended. I created questions that would give participants the opportunity to identify their barriers, discomforts, and fears rather than limiting responses to multiple-choice options based on barriers discussed in class. I was interested to learn how participants would respond without significant promptings or suggestions. In doing so, additional barriers rose to the surface. Although multiple-choice style answers would be beneficial in measuring the impact of specific content from presentations, using open-ended questions was transformative, if less clear-cut.

Development of Understanding of Barriers Revealed in Questionnaires

The concept of barriers was first introduced in the Pre-Project Questionnaire. I have included five participant responses, designating “Pre” for pre-project questionnaire response and “Post” for post-project questionnaire response to demonstrate development in understanding of the subject and of self over the course of six weeks.

Table 1. Pre/Post Questionnaire Response Comparison

	Question: “What reservations, discomfort, and/or fears do you have regarding engaging in ministry that is supernatural in nature?”
<i>Participant 1</i>	
Pre	“None”
Post	“Without having been such a conduit thus far, it can be a bit intimidating to believe that can pass through me.”
<i>Participant 2</i>	
Pre	“No reservations”
Post	“Fear of not having enough faith in God as my one and only Power Source. Fear of acceptance, what if I mess up? Will God see me through this that I’ve never attempted?”
<i>Participant 3</i>	
Pre	“Not much”
Post	“Making sure that it is ‘The Spirit’ working, not me.”

<i>Participant 4</i>	
Pre	“I’m so welcoming and open to it. I think I get nervous thinking I won’t say exactly the right thing or I’ll forget Scripture (word for word).”
Post	“I still doubt myself. I’m afraid to do or say the wrong thing, to be vulnerable. But I see it, I’m praying about it, and I want to be bold for God.”
<i>Participant 5</i>	
Pre	“Fear of speaking about faith in general”
Post	“Just by my unworthiness”

The responses above indicate that participants grew in self-awareness regarding areas of discomfort and fear related to supernatural ministry during the implementation of this project. Three respondents who initially claimed to have no reservations dug deeper in their post-project responses; a fourth participant became more specific in their post-project answer while also indicating that they are actively praying about the need and expressing readiness to begin; and a fifth participant began with a general response and concluded the class with a more vulnerable realization. The self-awareness illustrated by these post-project questionnaire responses should be honored and applauded. This is the work that moves disciples forward in the process of transformation.

Self-Identified Barriers Revealed in Interviews

The barriers identified below are drawn from participant responses during interviews, including several accidental admissions and references to barriers sprinkled throughout interview responses. I have categorized responses to better discern the big picture of barriers faced by participants, though these broader categories were not used during teaching sessions. It would be interesting to provide this data to group members to discover how many participants share the barriers identified by their classmates. I suspect that a high percentage would resonate with each category.

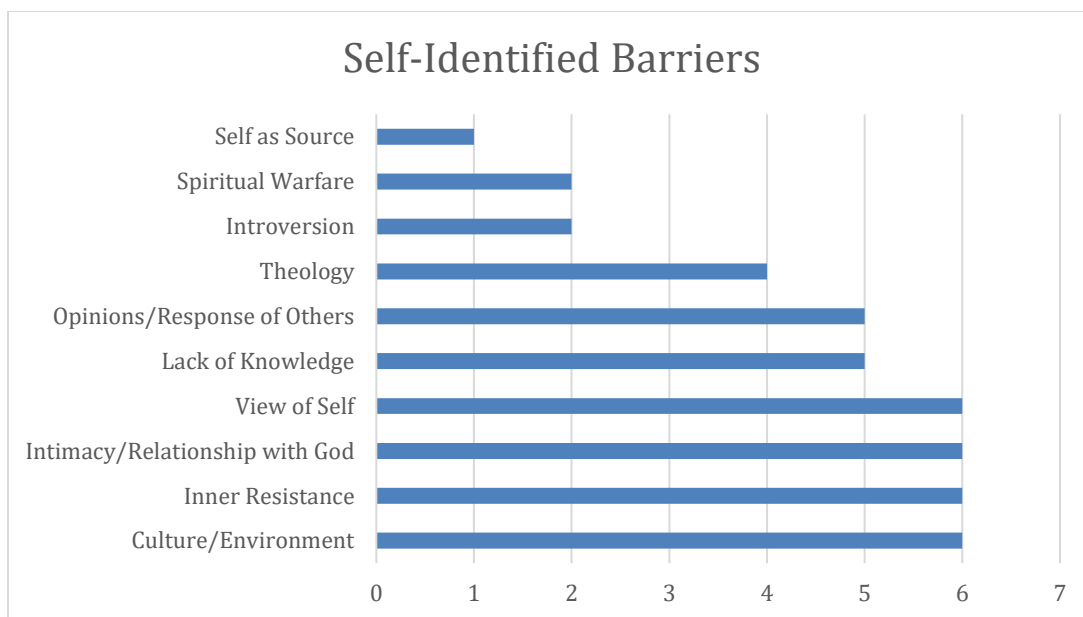


Figure 4. Self-Identified Barriers

I will break each category into the specific barriers listed by participants. The count reflected under category titles reflects the unique respondents identified, although some respondents may have identified more than one barrier in that category.

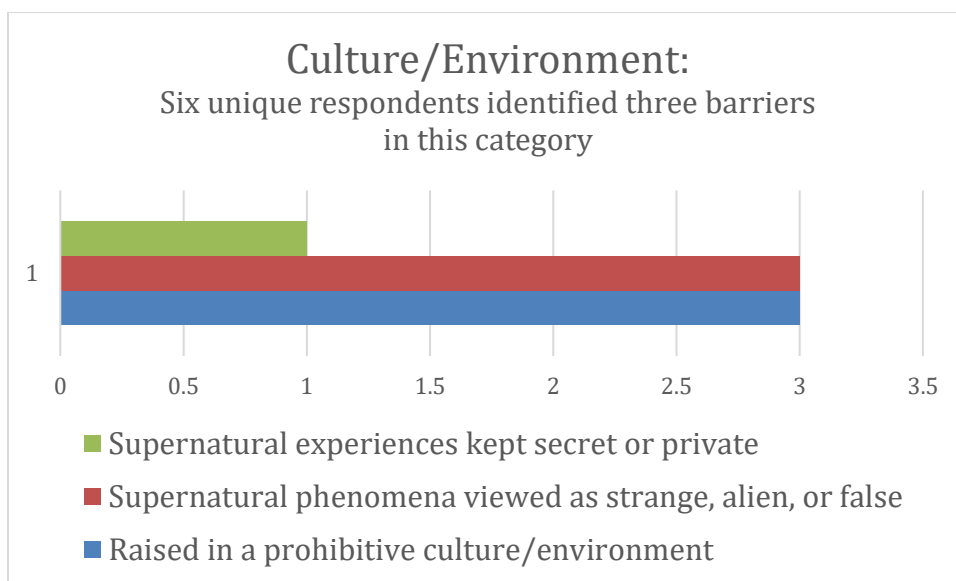


Figure 5. Culture/Environment

“Culture” or “Environment” was a common barrier reported by group members.

One participant explained that the culture of the United Methodist Church is reserved and

that they were raised to see “faith [as] personal and not outward.” This caused the individual to wonder if more public expressions of faith were phony or for show. Another participant identified environment as a barrier growing up in church: “The Holy Spirit was never mentioned. He found me when I was 26. That didn’t come through the church but through interdenominational prayer groups and being hungry for something else.” They also indicated that the perception was that “People who did the supernatural stuff were Assembly of God, and you stayed away from them because they were weird.” Another participant confided, “I hear more about supernatural experiences in recovery meetings than in church.” They further revealed that at times when they could not cry openly during the worship service at church, they would sneak into the balcony where they could express themselves more freely.

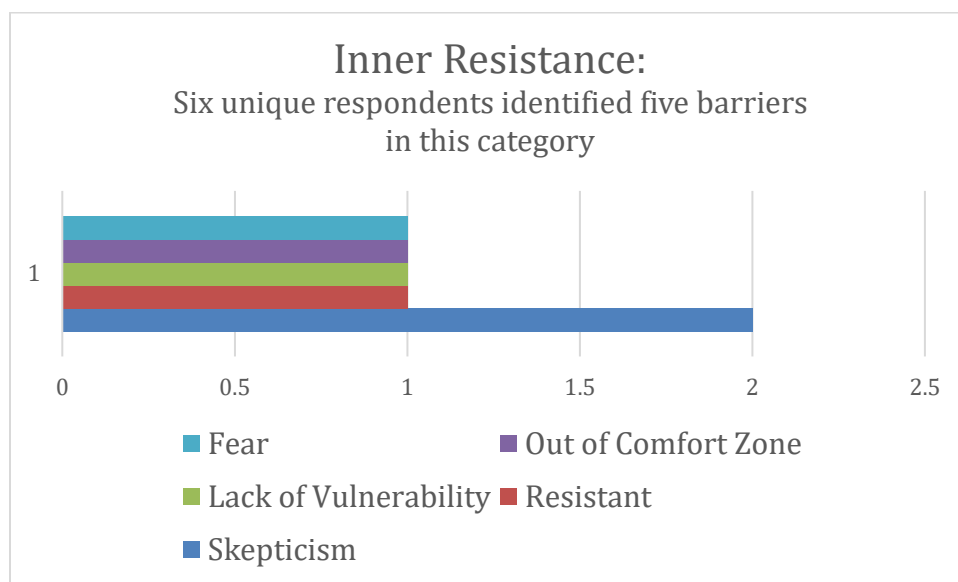


Figure 6. Inner Resistance

Additional research would be needed to more fully discern the source of barriers described above as “Inner Resistance.” Skepticism reflects Enlightenment philosophy; being out of one’s comfort zone could reflect a cultural or environmental barrier; and lack

of vulnerability reveals the need for a Source Exchange of God's ability for one's own ability. The barrier of being resistant could be due to several factors, as could the general reference to fear. While inner forms of resistance may be cognitive or affective in nature, they can also be spiritual. If barriers of inner resistance are not removed through prayer, reflection, spiritual conversation, and counseling, I would recommend receiving prayer for spiritual deliverance from an experienced and grace-filled minister.

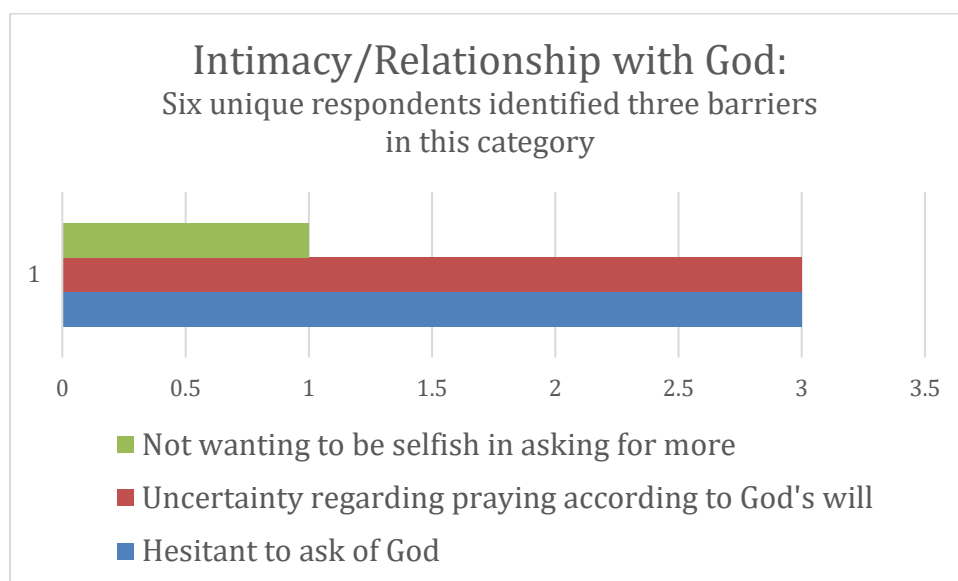


Figure 7. Intimacy/Relationship with God

Barriers related to “Intimacy/Relationship with God” were commonly experienced by group members. One participant expressed that they are now remembering to ask for divine intervention, whereas they previously “thought God gave you what He gave you.” Another group member explained, “I thought it was a sin to pray for myself. That’s how I was raised. You pray for others, but it’s selfish to pray for yourself. I didn’t know I could pray about my own healing.” A third participant spoke of their initial hesitance in seeking God for their own needs. They recalled a time when they experienced a medical crisis: “You asked me if I wanted to be healed, and I said ‘I don’t

know if God wants to heal me. I don't know if it's his will.'" This individual is now confident of God's desire to heal, and they desire to be used by God in healing prayer ministry for others.

In a denomination that focuses on the theology and experience of grace, one must ask how United Methodists still wrestle with trusting in God's gracious provision and presence in our lives. Perhaps a more robust engagement with supernatural ministry would help church members rely on God's grace for real-life needs. Grace as a theoretical concept is nice, whereas grace put into practice through supernatural ministry is tangible, gritty, and glorious.

Related to this reluctance to ask for provision through prayer, especially for oneself, is the concern of praying according to God's will. Three additional group members raised the concern of asking for too much or for something contrary to God's will. One group member pointed out that the common usage of "if it be thy will" is like saying, "I believe, but if it doesn't happen, it wasn't your will. [This disclaimer] gives us an out." Another respondent expressed that they are now "more likely to ask God to change the situation . . . if I ask in the right way, asking for God's will and not mine." Although discernment and humility are crucially important when praying, hesitance to pray for healing or provision is often due to a lack of teaching regarding God's revealed character, promises, and purposes. Therefore, I will add a section to the curriculum for future studies to help class members discover the character and promises of God as revealed in Scripture. This will provide a guideline for praying according to God's will based on God's Word rather than based on our fears.

A newfound openness to seeking and asking led one group member into a closer relationship with God. “I feel like [God and I] talk a lot more. I don’t have the anxiety that I used to. I’m able to call on Him more when I know that I need help instead of forgetting that’s even an option. I’m plugged into God about 70%-75% of the time when before it was only 30%-40%.”

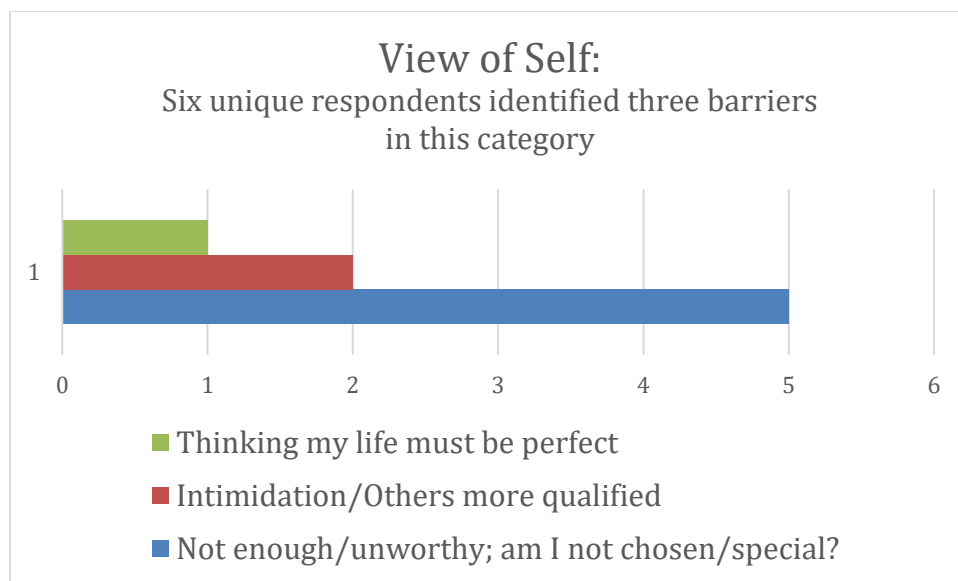


Figure 8. View of Self

Between attending a church that affirms that we are created in the image of God and living in a society that is constantly saying, “You are enough,” it is curious that “View of Self” is one of the most common barriers to supernatural ministry. I would posit that one’s view of self is interconnected with one’s relationship with God. Spiritual formation is therefore crucial to participating in supernatural ministry, for before disciples can discover that they are empowered by God, they need to know that they are loved by God.

One participant reported experiencing a significant breakthrough during a class session regarding a life-long barrier of feeling unworthy. They shared this supernatural

experience in general terms with the class and then more specifically during their follow-up interview. They explained, “For the first time in my life, I realized I spent my whole life [feeling unloved]. . . . I don’t think I’ve ever really accepted anybody loving me. It was like God just said, ‘You are worthy of love even if you didn’t find it where you expected to find it.’” Notably, this breakthrough occurred when another group member shared a personal experience that was similar to this participant’s experience. This was the most dramatic removal of a barrier reported, and it happened within community in response to another group member’s vulnerability.

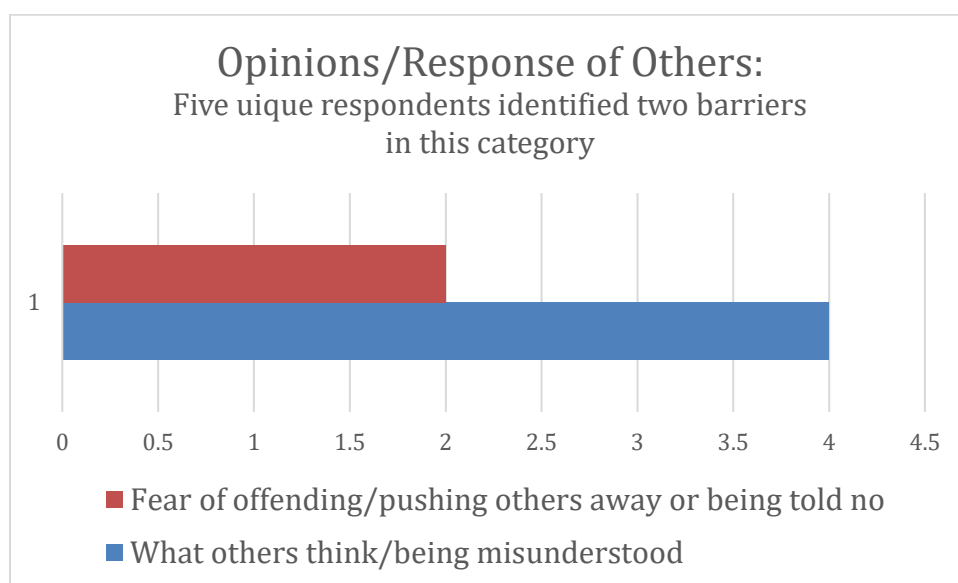


Figure 9. Opinions/Responses of Others

The social ramifications of supernatural ministry registered in several participants’ descriptions of personal barriers related to “Opinions/Responses of Others.” Some participants were uncertain and skeptical about the subject of supernatural ministry itself, while others were comfortable with the subject matter and yet were hesitant to speak openly about their thoughts and experiences. Class discussion and written feedback

revealed a common fear of being labeled as “crazy” or misunderstood due to their interest in supernatural ministry.

Interestingly, the concern was not only that the participants would be judged by others but also that relationships would be compromised. One respondent summarized this barrier, saying, “You can be ostracized. You can be ridiculed in public. People can isolate themselves from you. You would hate to be trying to help somebody, and all of the sudden, you don’t have access to them.” They went on to ask, “How do I witness? How do I channel anything their way without pushing them away?” This statement revealed a heartfelt desire to minister to people in a way that can be understood and received. While this question has the potential to become a true barrier when rooted in fear, it may also become a motivator to grow in spiritual discernment.

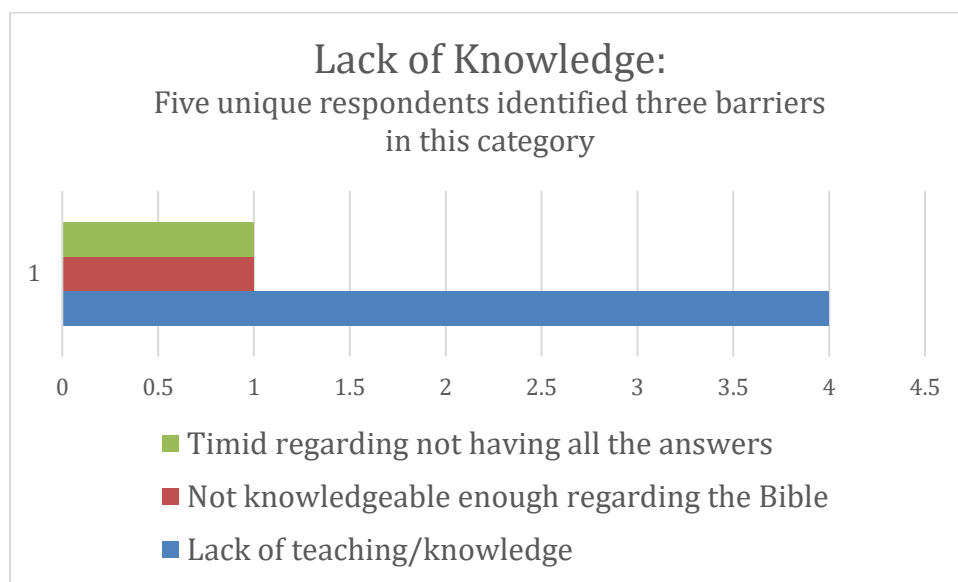


Figure 10. Lack of Knowledge

The concern regarding “Lack of Knowledge” reflects a problem in prevalent models of discipleship. Given that churches typically focus more on teaching Bible studies than on practical ministry training, it is fair to ask whether our Bible teaching is

empowering people for Spirit-empowered ministry. Despite the customary focus of churches on offering Bible studies, many church members do not feel that they know enough about the Bible. This may be due to a lack of personal devotional Bible reading or to the false assumption that one must reach the status of a scholar before they can be trusted to engage in ministry. Just how much of the Bible must one know to feel prepared? How many answers to how many questions must disciples have in their hip pocket to operate in supernatural ministry? The fear of not knowing enough may indicate the presence of additional barriers, such as viewing oneself as inadequate or unworthy.

Moving to the heart of the matter, I would suggest that the primary issue is a lack of teaching on the Person of the Spirit and on supernatural ministry. This lack of teaching reflects problems within church culture and church leadership. The most obvious difficulty is that you can't teach what you don't know, and seminaries do not typically teach pastors-in-training about supernatural ministry. When seminaries do teach these subjects, they are usually elective classes. Whereas Jesus called, empowered, and deployed disciples into the supernatural ministry of healing and deliverance, we have too often boiled discipleship down to attending classes. You indeed reap what you sow, and the institutional church has failed to sow the seeds for a supernatural harvest.

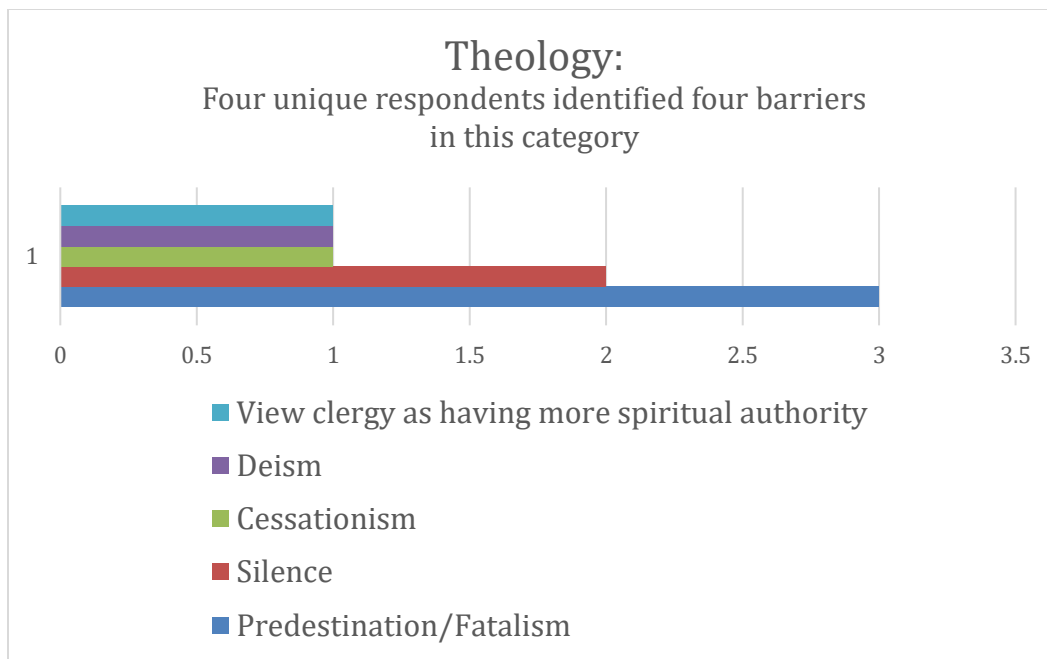


Figure 11. Theology

One participant indicated cessationism as a barrier that they personally faced in numerous denominations growing up, including the UMC: “They didn’t discuss it. And when a question would get asked, they would go, ‘No, no, we don’t do that now. That was just for the apostles and the early church.’ It was like an echo chamber no matter where I went.” Another participant indicated that they experience a barrier related to “Theology” in that they feel more comfortable bringing people to receive prayer from clergy. They acknowledged, “I’ve prayed with them, but I wanted the big power. You are called to this, and I would just assume in my mind you have more power and authority than I would on my own.” It is indeed appropriate to bring persons to receive prayer from church leaders as directed in James 5:14, and I take great joy in praying for those brought

to the church for prayer. However, this participant's response also reveals the "institutionalizing of the Spirit"¹ as a theological barrier.

I believe more participants would have identified theological barriers as affecting them personally if more time had been devoted to each theological position. In some cases, I discerned that these theological influences were so ingrained that participants did not recognize them as barriers. While I would like to give more time to theological subjects in the future, I must also acknowledge that the data clearly reveals affective barriers to be more prevalent than cognitive barriers for these participants. Therefore, discussing how we can develop intimacy with God will likely bear more fruit than in-depth teaching on the Protestant Reformation.

An additional barrier that falls under the category of theology is that of silence. A primary reason for discomfort regarding supernatural ministry is the silence of much of the Western Church on the subject. During interviews, one participant expressed their experience by saying, "I had wonderful Sunday School teachers, and we learned wonderful things, but [the Holy Spirit] just wasn't on the menu. And you don't even know to ask for it." They went on to say, "My prayer is that my children and my grandchildren experience that powerful relationship with the Holy Spirit at a much younger age than I did."

¹ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2017), 129.

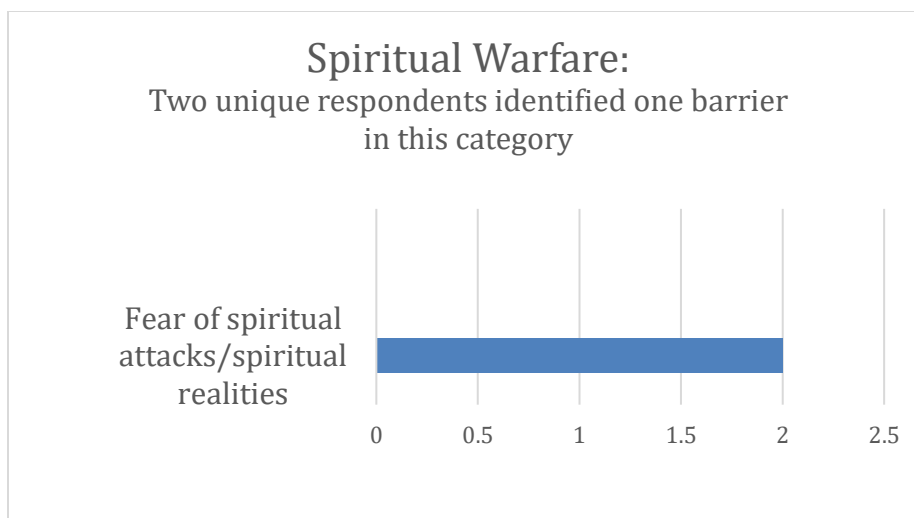


Figure 12. Spiritual Warfare

Two individuals wrestled with a fear of opening the wrong spiritual doors and the potential impact of “Spiritual Warfare.” This reveals an awareness on the part of these group members regarding the serious responsibility of supernatural ministry and the importance of being spiritually prepared. It further reveals the need to intentionally teach church members how one may open the right doors and enter the spiritual battlefield in a state of readiness. One participant moved past their fear of disturbing the spiritual hornets’ nest and has now come to a place of readiness to act, whereas a second participant is still in the process. Additional teaching on supernatural ministry is needed, as well as discussion of the spiritual barrier of fear.

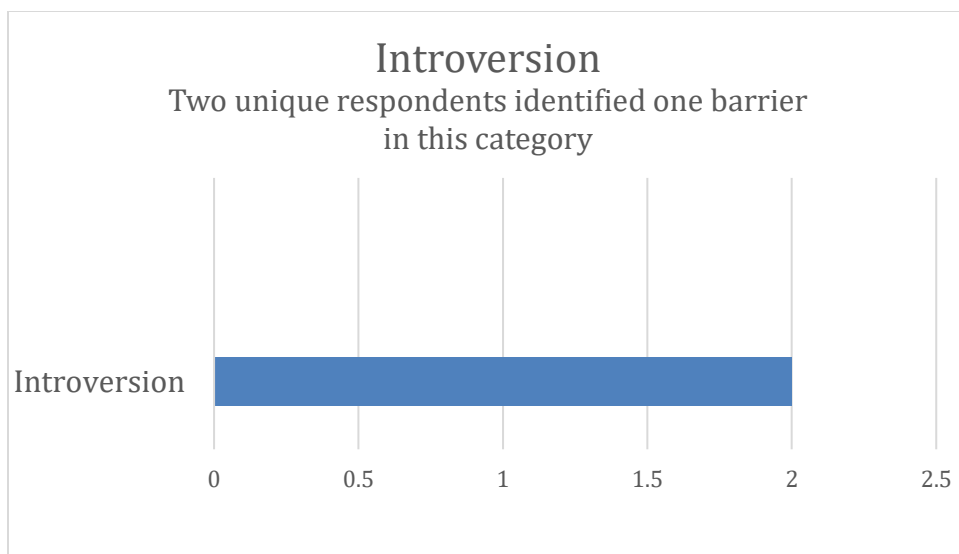


Figure 13. Introversion

The inclusion of “Introversion” as a barrier should not be read as a judgment regarding this personality type. Rather, it acknowledges that two participants referenced the prohibitive nature of introversion in achieving their desired goals. It would be interesting to explore possible advantages of introversion for supernatural ministry, such as perceptiveness and the ability to listen well.

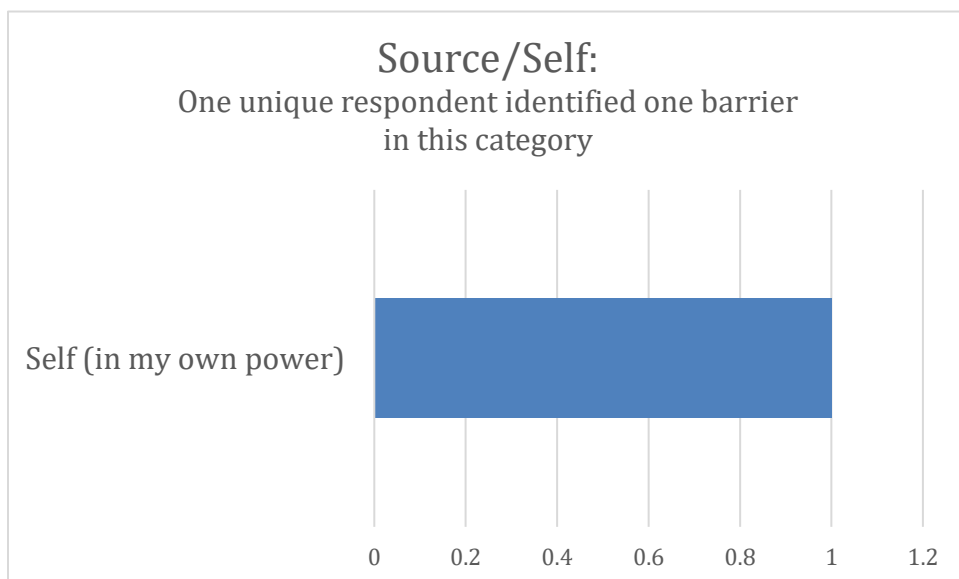


Figure 14. Source/Self

Whereas only one respondent identified “Self” as their primary barrier (“Just me trying to do it in my own power”), numerous persons referenced the importance of relying on God. Although this data was taken from post-project interviews, another participant identified the desire to differentiate the leading of the Holy Spirit from their own inclinations numerous times during class discussion. The overall response of the group to the final session on the Source Exchange indicates that, given the opportunity, more participants would identify themselves as a barrier.

Lack of Trust as a Barrier to Supernatural Ministry

A lack of trust for God and self can serve as a major barrier to participating in supernatural ministry. Journal responses provide additional data regarding barriers, in this case specifically related to unhealed wounds. Responses to the question, “What unhealed wounds or disappointments hold you back from trusting God?” include: unanswered prayer, the sense that adversity is “my cross to bear,” the suicide of a parent, the influence of a domineering parent, wrestling with personal will vs. God’s will, experience of rejection and abandonment, and survivor’s guilt. One individual expressed their trust for God in the midst of disappointment, “I did everything I could on this earth, and He still said no. But I trust Him more than I hurt.”

Participants also responded to the question of what holds them back from trusting themselves. Responses include mistakes made in the past, choosing a path that led to pain, lifelong sin patterns, and ignoring warning signs in past decisions. Most of these barriers could fall under the categories of regret and shame.

Unhealed wounds and regret constitute a significant number of barriers to the work of the Spirit. Experiencing healing of these wounds and regret is crucial if we are to trust God to meet us where we are and respond to our prayer. Trust in God and forgiveness of self must be established to operate in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Although it is not necessary to trust in one's own strength, it will be difficult to flow in the Spirit if the individual is more focused on controlling or punishing self than on welcoming the presence of the Spirit to work within and through them.

Shift in Perception of Supernatural Ministry

The shift in participants' view of supernatural ministry led to a greater openness to new possibilities. One group member reported, "I'm no longer afraid to use the word supernatural. It wasn't in my vocabulary before; it was otherworldly. It doesn't faze me at all now." Another explained that "the supernatural became more approachable, more common, less super, less out there. [It became] something that can happen within my little sphere of the world." They went on to say, "I never really thought about how I could become available to the Holy Spirit or how the Holy Spirit could become available to me. Never a personableness . . . It became more heart knowledge than head knowledge."

While some participants experienced a transformation in their view of supernatural concepts, others simply came out of hiding. One respondent commented during their interview, "It broadened my understanding in that it made it more publicly acceptable. It's always kind of been a secret thing with me; it's not something I've been really open about." Another group member expressed a new level of openness resulting from the class, saying, "I kept [my beliefs] under a blanket because I was Methodist. I

was able to be more honest with that group.” An encouraging summary of the significance of the class came from a group member who said, “God is truly so much bigger than I even imagined. . . . It’s opened a whole new level of thinking. I’m trying to look at things differently and not put them in that little box. It’s kind of liberating.”

Openness to the Spirit

Ten participants referenced openness during their final interviews, including open hearts, open eyes, open doors, and the experience and/or need of becoming more open to possibilities and to the Holy Spirit. One participant, however, had a more negative connotation, explaining, “You want to open the right doors. I don’t feel confident to know that I’m opening the right doors.” The next step in helping this individual move forward will call for discernment regarding whether technical teaching and training are needed or whether inner healing is needed.

One participant said, “It’s opened doors already because I’m thinking about it.” Another stated, “For me, to see or witness supernatural happenings in real life was something that I had not really been around. So, I’m coming to the understanding that we, as humans, are capable of being a part of that. We just have to be open enough to be that channel.” The repeated references to openness confirm the importance of removing barriers of restrictive beliefs that hinder an openness through which God can move. Without the intentional removal of these roadblocks, prescriptive teaching on methodology may not bear the desired fruit.

Supernatural DNA

Class members had lively responses to learning about the spiritual roots of Methodism. One participant found it “Astounding, considering I’ve taken all those John Wesley studies. They kind of forgot to mention that.” Another respondent indicated that despite attending the UMC for years, they did not have a great deal of knowledge about our history or theology. They realized, “Oh my gosh, I think I’m a United Methodist!”

The class appreciated seeing John Wesley in a new light. For one participant, the lack of sensationalism was appreciated. They noted that reading Wesley’s accounts of supernatural encounters “was like he was telling me what he bought at the grocery store.” They found his experience and writing style to be relatable. In a somewhat humorous response, a group member said, “It was exciting. I totally love how uptight he was but how willing he was anyway. He was out of his comfort [zone] but seemed to embrace it.”

When asked during the interview about the loss of this aspect of Methodist history in mainstream Methodism, one student answered, “About it being swept under the rug? I think it’s sad. I think it has caused us to judge other churches like Pentecostals as being too emotional or too weird when that’s how we started out. That’s what gathered the harvest. Maybe that’s why we’re declining.” When asked the same question, another participant simply answered, “Sad. I feel like somebody took my inheritance away.”

Field Work

The concept of the harvest was introduced in the Bible study session on motivations for ministry and reinforced by a discussion of early Methodist field preaching during the history session. In a post-project interview question, participants

demonstrated that they had made the connection between harvest ministry and supernatural ministry. An outward-focused mindset surfaced prominently and passionately in response to a question regarding what our church would look like if we were to operate in ministries of healing, deliverance, and using spiritual gifts. Although I expected answers to focus on how this would be expressed within our congregation, several respondents envisioned Spirit-empowered ministry sending us “outside the walls of the church” to be “more involved in the community” in response to “so many needs in the community that need healing” and the belief that “we would feel more empowered to address those.” Another stated, “It wouldn’t just be within the walls of the church; it would be fresh expressions.” Another participant saw the church going to “the fields”:

I think we’d be a lot more active. I think what we do is great . . . but I think that if we took to heart and followed what the Bible says you should do, we would be a lot more active . . . taking our ministry out to the fields. We would be alive with the Spirit and spreading it everywhere. We would be at the nursing homes. We would be taking care of people instead of raising money for other people to take care of people.

In a reversal of the view that mission is an outflow of worship, another respondent spoke to supernatural ministry happening in the mission field as leading to worship in the sanctuary, “I think the people would come because we wouldn’t wait for them to come in the door. We’d be reaching out. Then worship would be just that—we’d be grateful for the things that have gone on outside the doors. Supernatural ministry happens outside. The sanctuary is a result of what happens outside the doors.”

Readiness to Participate in Spirit-Empowered Ministry

A primary goal of this study was to increase the readiness of group members to participate in supernatural ministry. Given the importance of this data in proving my

hypothesis, I will record each participant's response below to the post-project interview question, "Do you feel a greater level of readiness to participate in Spirit-empowered ministry?"

Table 2. Readiness to Participate in Spirit-Empowered Ministry

1.	"Yeah, I do. It's biblical; the disciples weren't prepared. But I feel like we are better prepared. We've been prepared for years. It's time . . . I've just got to be bold, to be vulnerable."
2.	"I think so. People are timid because they don't feel like they have the answers. Now I know it's ok not having the answers."
3.	"Yes, I do feel a greater level of readiness to continue to pray with those he leads me to and to witness, plus healing not only for the body but also [areas of emotional and spiritual healing]."
4.	"I think so. I think probably being bolder in what I'm already doing . . . being more open and looking more and asking more." (This individual went on to explain they are already seeking to engage a coworker in spiritual conversation.)
5.	"I feel more permission to . . . It's more acceptable than I thought it was. That was part of my paradigm shift."
6.	"Yes. To step out. To be more prayerful with people."
7.	"Yes. Because there is a community that has gone through this, and there was an agreement among members that we want to be actionable and not just remain in that rectangle (referring to sitting at tables in a classroom)."
8.	"Yes. Take action. Do something. I want to do the Prayer Room. I need to be bolder. I need to read my Bible."
9.	"Yeah, that I'm still trying to figure out." (The participant also expressed a focus on growing in discernment in this area as well as in healing ministry.)
10.	"Yes. It's not anything to be afraid of, and [I've learned] that God can use me. I just need to walk where he leads me, to pay attention, and to be open, even if I don't have that picture-perfect devotional time."
11.	"Yes, I do. I feel that I'm ready for Spirit-empowerment now. To me, it's the next level. I've always wanted to do this type of ministry. I just wanted God to surround me with people who wanted to do this type of ministry. I know there's something different in me. It was good to know that there were other people in the class striving for the same thing."
12.	"Yeah, I think so. I think I'm more open. Trying to be more open. (The participant expressed interest in healing ministry, deliverance, and reading more on the subject of supernatural ministry.)
13.	"I'm closer to the readiness stage. I want to be involved. I'm more ready now than before the class." (This participant indicated that they are becoming less timid in speaking up about their faith when the opportunity arises at work.)

Participants demonstrated varied levels of readiness to participate in Spirit-empowered ministry, with some chomping at the bit and others still cautiously considering their options. Each replied to the question with an openness to and interest in

supernatural ministry. Further, readiness was revealed not only through this interview question but also demonstrated through journal entries, post-project questionnaires, and during our final gathering.

One respondent wrote in their post-project questionnaire, “The work of the Holy Spirit in and through me is a wonderful, awesome gift that I don’t have to hide, but share with others to glorify God!” Another reported, “I’m now in a new, unfamiliar area of believing I can have more power through the Holy Spirit than I thought possible before.” Others expressed a desire to get started, to be trained, to open the door, and to discern their spiritual gifts. Another sign of readiness was seen in a post-project questionnaire response that adeptly summarized the spirit of this entire project, “I think I’ve been the source too long. It’s exhausting. I’m ready to let go and let God lead.”

Next Steps

Group members expressed a desire during interviews to have accountability and to develop and grow. They asked if I would lead the study again. One individual said, “It was almost a call to action.” Regarding the urgency of the harvest, another participant said, “This is like 911. We need help; we need to get this done. This is like at the fire station—it is not like finish your dinner. This is like slide down the fire pole and let’s go.” Another stated, “I am thirsty for more because of this study. I need more.” One journal entry read, “I want to see healings, real live healings . . . not just talked about healings!”

During our final session, twelve of thirteen participants were present and responded to a discussion question regarding next steps and the spiritual gifts to which

they feel drawn. Some participants named more than one gift. The next steps of exploration for participants were: Healing (6), Discernment (3), Prophecy (2), Trust (2), Being Open (1), Boldness (1), Compassion (1), Deliverance (1), and Word of Knowledge (1). Although “trust” and “being open” are not listed in Scripture as spiritual gifts, they are important qualities needed to break through barriers to Spirit-empowered ministry. The most common responses designated an interest in healing and discernment. Further, the individual who expressed interest in deliverance noted that they see deliverance as a form of healing.

During the final session, one respondent did not specify a spiritual gift toward which they felt called. Rather, they referenced grief related to a prior experience and the fear that they would “mess up again.” In reviewing this participant’s follow-up interview responses to discern whether there was a pattern, I discovered another indication that fear is a barrier for this individual. In response to an interview question regarding what would occur if our congregation were to operate in healing, deliverance, and the gifts of the Spirit, they replied, “I think it would change a lot for the kingdom of God...that would mean that I would be fulfilling a calling that I need to fulfill that I’m afraid to.” While it is the objective of this project to help participants identify barriers, I believe that pastoral guidance may be needed to help some individuals identify and break through barriers. In this case, inner healing may be needed for this individual to move past the barriers of grief and fear. The need for inner healing is common, and many, if not all, participants would benefit from this. Accordingly, I am planning to offer a Freedom Ministry training to interested church members in the coming months.

From Readiness to Action

Responses from participants revealed that many are already moving past a state of readiness into an active engagement with others. In response to a class discussion question regarding how beliefs and expectations of God have changed over the past six weeks, one individual stated, “I feel like the Holy Spirit is giving me new language (in my work). My language has gone from self-esteem to ‘do you know what God thinks of you?’” This indicates a Source Exchange from our view of self to God’s view of us. Another participant indicated that they are bringing God into their work and that they had the “courage to talk about God when a door was opened.” Another explained that whereas they may have held back in the past, they sense God speaking through them to others regarding forgiveness and inner healing, “God is bringing people to me. Part of it is recognizing it and having the courage to speak.” Another group member reported experiencing new levels of boldness to speak up regarding spiritual truths.

Yet another participant spoke of seeing a friend in the store who told them about the health problems they were experiencing. The group member noted that had this happened in the past, they would have simply said, “I’ll be praying for you.” They went on to explain, “But I’ve gone from that to, ‘May I pray for you?’ Right here, right now. She was like, ‘Yes, I would love for you to do that.’ We’re hugging it out in the grocery store. I would have never known to do that or follow that nudge.”

Building on this momentum, as well as on participants’ desire to put what they have learned into action, my primary context associate and I are planning a follow-up class that will equip a team to serve in a new prayer room ministry. We also held a small healing prayer gathering a few weeks after our final class session for members of our

group. One participant reported experiencing her hand becoming warm while praying for another person (heat in one's hands is often a manifestation of the Holy Spirit). Another participant reported seeing a vision regarding an individual who received prayer. A follow-up text message from a participant read, "I loved our prayer time today and can't wait to hear how people experience their healing from God!" and another read, "It was a very special time. It's hard to describe, and I am still processing."

Surprising Examples of Personal Transformation

One participant noted a new experience of spiritual discernment and sensitivity regarding things they had previously overlooked: "I've always felt the Holy Spirit, but I felt it thicker as a result of talking about the Holy Spirit. And I don't even know how to describe it; even stuff that normally isn't abrasive to me has become abrasive to my spirit. What once was ok isn't ok." This experience of sanctification by the power of the Holy Spirit is foundational within our Wesleyan theology.

Another group member received a new perspective regarding their experience of the Holy Spirit. This individual is new to the United Methodist Church and expressed a surprising result of becoming part of our community, both the larger congregation and this class. Having been nurtured in a lively expression of charismatic Christianity, this individual discovered that one does not need to be tied to any specific manner of prayer to conjure up the Holy Spirit:

I was taught the radical [way of seeking God and worshiping], and I learned that everything is not radical like that. I was taught that you had to get up and praise through the house, [you] have to do this and that, and then I found out that it isn't always like that. Jesus can still talk to you and bless you even without all that. I don't need [a formula] to get the Holy Spirit. He's right here.

Building Community

The class achieved an important goal that was not specifically identified in the project agenda but is crucially important if this work is to continue. The class was filled with a group of like-minded persons for the purpose of support, encouragement, and a safe community in which to be further equipped for ministry. This experience of community helped group members realize they are not alone, and numerous participants indicated that these new connections are important to them.

One individual stated, “It helped to realize that there are other people that are in the same situation or same point that I’m in. That they’re trying to grow, but they’re still a little apprehensive, as well. It’s nice to know there are other people in the same boat with you. Sometimes we think we’re all alone.” I anticipate that a number of those within the class who were hesitant to speak up will be more open to doing so in the future due to the encouragement received and the trust established within this core group. Another respondent summed up what seemed to be a shared sentiment, “You brought together people who felt alone and walked us through slowly. And now we have this community that is supportive. Affirmation that I’m not alone, that [supernatural ministry] is from God, and that I’m not alone.”

Conclusion

The goal of my project was to lead participants through a process of removing barriers to the work of the Spirit in their lives. As a result, they would be liberated to embrace the validity and availability of Spirit-empowered ministry. Based on the data and anecdotes provided above, my hypothesis was supported in that a transformative

process created to reveal cognitive and affective barriers to supernatural ministry led participants to reclaim the validity and availability of God's supernatural power. The group demonstrated remarkable growth in their recognition of personal barriers and in a readiness to move forward in Spirit-empowered ministry. Further, they experienced personal transformation and began to demonstrate a newfound boldness by engaging others in intentional spiritual conversation and ministry. Group members experienced a *metanoia* of heart and mind, as well as an ensuing liberty to participate in supernatural ministry. This ministry project was effective in that participants intentionally and thoughtfully engaged the content, with the data points revealing not only a readiness to participate in supernatural ministry but also an eagerness to do so.

Perhaps the greatest strength of the project was that it was permission-giving, not only in embracing new possibilities but also in unearthing unfruitful belief systems. The class was invited to question assumptions, theological perspectives, church culture, and even family dynamics. Whereas systems of discipleship are often based on learning more information, the class was encouraged to examine and unlearn beliefs as needed.

The project further provided a safe space in which to discuss a subject that is often perceived as taboo within the Western Church. In doing so, church members created a new community of like-minded people who are seeking a more active, empowered level of discipleship. Although group members expressed appreciation for the sense of community experienced, it is possible that they would not have known to name this as a need before the class began. Further, it is likely that very few within the group would have asked for a study of this nature. I believe some would have sought out a class focused on teaching technical skills, but fewer would have registered for a class

dedicated to challenging long-held beliefs and embracing vulnerability. This was not your typical discipleship study but more of a “let’s upset the apple cart” experience. I am aware and appreciative that several class members signed up for the study primarily to help their pastor, and yet even this relational motivation was appropriate. After all, supernatural ministry is a more relational experience than a technical endeavor, as it is based on intimacy and reliance upon God.

I noticed early on that group members asked questions regarding the mechanics of supernatural ministry. We are wired to seek “how-to” instructions. However, I wanted the group’s implementation of Spirit-empowered ministry to be fueled by a deeper well than best practices and willpower. It is all too common to utilize templates and cookie-cutter methodologies without tapping into the Source. Although I was initially tempted to create a more practical “how-to” training, I instead focused on laying a solid foundation by plowing the ground, leveling the ground by filling in gaps, and clearing away roadblocks.

At first, I wondered if my work was too basic and simplistic, not in its content but in its primary goal. Creating a readiness within participants to implement Spirit-empowered ministry didn’t sound quite as exciting as sending a group out two-by-two to heal and deliver persons within our community. I wanted to build, not deconstruct. I wanted to multiply, not uproot. However, I discovered that tearing down false assumptions, limiting beliefs, and oppressive forces is highly rewarding and necessary for the work at hand. This work of transformation is essential for equipping persons for supernatural ministry.

I am tremendously proud of the impact and future potential of this project. This work brought together my passion for equipping believers for ministry and guiding

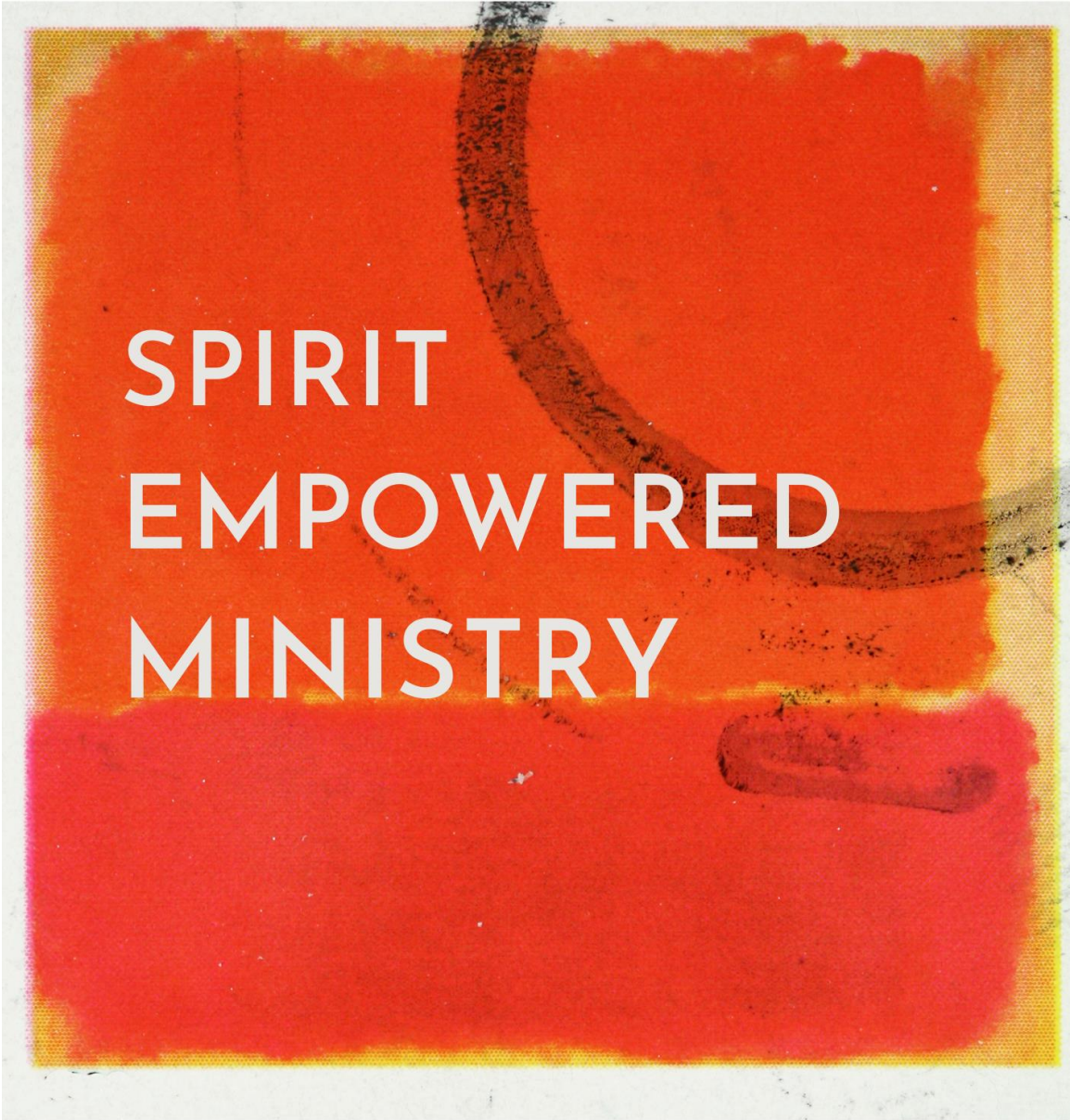
people in the work of spiritual growth. I also found this work to be aligned with the ministry of healing and deliverance as it provided healing from soul wounds and deliverance from oppressive forces and hindrances. I am deeply thankful for and proud of the thirteen members of this class. Reading their responses to questionnaires and journal entries was a privileged peek into their souls. The final interviews opened new doors for deeper relationships as well as pastoral care and counseling. This newly formed community taught me a great deal regarding what is needed to empower people for supernatural ministry. I hope that they will continue to process their learnings from this experience, just as I will continue to process what I have learned from the group, revising the content and methodology accordingly.

Regarding future offerings of this study, I would simplify some of the content, add additional information regarding inner healing from emotional barriers, talk with men in the congregation to personally invite them to attend, and opt for in-person gatherings over online options when possible. I would also consider expanding the class sessions to include more practical teaching on supernatural ministry towards the end of the class, as well as include simplified answers to common questions and clarifications regarding spiritual experiences. This would include basic information on subjects such as deliverance and which supernatural practices are supported (and prohibited) within Scripture.

The implementation of this project has strengthened my conviction that equipping disciples for supernatural ministry is crucial if we are to fruitfully engage the spiritual harvest of this generation. There is a hunger among laity to participate in deeper works of the Spirit, but due to a lack of teaching on the subject, they don't even know how to ask

for more. It is time for the Western Church to repent for equipping disciples for membership rather than for Spirit-empowered ministry. It is time for the institutional church, or perhaps a wild and restless remnant, to follow Jesus into the fields.

APPENDIX A
WORKBOOK COVER



SPIRIT EMPOWERED MINISTRY

**A 7-WEEK STUDY
ON THE AVAILABILITY OF
GOD'S SUPERNATURAL POWER**

BY BLOSSOM MATTHEWS

APPENDIX B

WORKBOOK TABLE OF CONTENTS

SPIRIT-EMPOWERED MINISTRY:

A 7-Week Study on the Availability of God's Supernatural Power

Class and workbook created by Blossom Matthews

Doctor of Ministry Project | United Theological Seminary | September 2022

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Name of Participant:

APPENDIX C

PRE/POST PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. What is your understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the Church? What is your understanding of the work of the Holy Spirit in and through you personally?
2. How would you define the word “supernatural”?
3. How comfortable would you feel praying for Spirit-empowered healing and deliverance? Have you ever witnessed either?

APPENDIX D
JOURNAL INSTRUCTIONS

Spirit-Empowered Ministry

Journal Prompts

Record your responses for each journal prompt in one of the following ways: write a brief response below each prompt on the pages provided, write your answers in a journal (clearly marking which question you are answering), or type your answers into a word document.

Be sure that your assigned “participant identification number” is clearly written on your journal (do not sign your name).

There are no right or wrong answers to journal questions! Please be honest and direct in your responses. Your journal entries may be as short or as long as needed in order to reflect your thoughts and feelings on the subject.

While it would be ideal to spend more time on each journal question by spacing them throughout the week, it may work best for you to answer them all at once. Do what works within the rhythm of your week.

Finally, consider beginning your journaling by praying aloud the “Prayer of Invitation” for the week that is provided along with the journal prompts.

Your Participant Identification Number: _____

APPENDIX E

JOURNAL PROMPTS FOR WEEK 1

Journal Prompts for Week 1: Sept 6 – Sept 12

Gracious God, I ask you to provide the time needed to commit to this learning process, the courage to think and to listen, spiritual discernment to hear your voice above all others, and openness to the work of your Spirit in and through me. I pray this in the name of Jesus Christ, my Lord. Amen.

1. How and when have you experienced the presence and/or power of the Holy Spirit in your personal life? When have you experienced the presence and/or power of the Holy Spirit in the life of your church (if experienced at another church, please specify denomination)?
2. What spiritual gifts have you seen modeled and honored in your experience of church? What treatment (if any) have gifts such as healing, miracles, prophecy, words of knowledge, discernment of spirits (see 1 Corinthians 12:7-11) received? Why do you think some spiritual gifts receive more attention than others?
3. What questions, concerns, doubts, and/or fears do you have regarding participating in Spirit-empowered ministry?

APPENDIX F
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Post-Project Interview Questions

1. How have your beliefs about God and supernatural ministry changed as a result of this class?
2. Has your relationship with God through the Holy Spirit or your personal experience of God changed over the past seven weeks? If so, how?
3. Has your expectation of God changed in any way? If so, how?
4. Going back to our Bible study (Matthew 9:35-38), we talked about the compassion of Jesus and the urgency of the harvest. On a scale of 1-10, where would you rate your level of compassion for lost, wounded, and broken people? On a scale of 1-10, where would you rate your level of urgency for the harvest? How does this affect your willingness to take risks through supernatural ministry?
5. What barriers to supernatural ministry have you identified in your own life and faith? (Could be social, emotional, theological, or philosophical) Is that barrier still there? (If yes, what are you going to do about it?)
6. What aspect of this study has been the most helpful to you personally?
7. What aspect of this study has been the most challenging?
8. What aspect of this study made you uncomfortable or even angry?
9. What was your initial response to learning about the supernatural history of the Methodist movement and of our founder, John Wesley? Why do you think this is new information to so many United Methodists? How do you feel about our history being redacted and watered down?
10. What percentage of the content of this class would you say you were previously exposed to in church (specify which church as needed)? Why do you think that number is so low/high?

11. If the United Methodist Church and FUMC Hobbs were to take seriously Jesus' authorization of disciples to heal and deliver as well as God's promise of the gifts of the Spirit, how would the ministry of our church change? How would your life and ministry change?
12. Do you feel a greater level of readiness to participate in Spirit-empowered ministry? If not, what is needed to increase readiness? If so, what next steps is God nudging you to take?
13. Are there any topics you are wrestling with or wish we had talked more about?
14. Is there anything else you would like to share or that would be helpful for me to know?

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